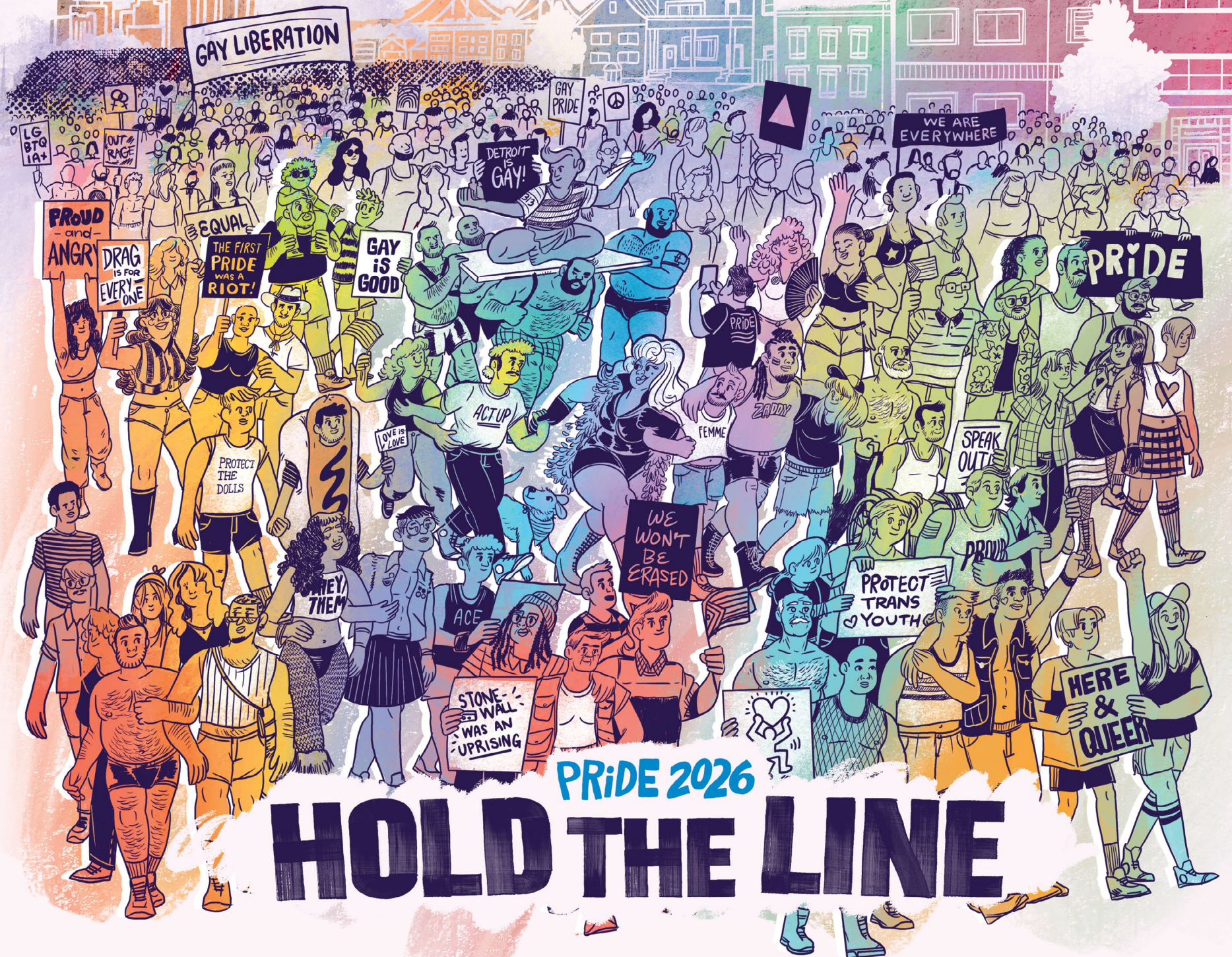


MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between THE Lines<sup>TM</sup>



## PRIDE 2026 HOLD THE LINE

### PRIDE SEASON GUIDE

Your 2026 Michigan  
LGBTQ+ Pride calendar

### 73 WAYS TO HOLD THE LINE

How to show up for each  
other when it matters most

### IN THEIR WORDS

Kesha, Melissa Etheridge  
and Jessica Wild talk Pride



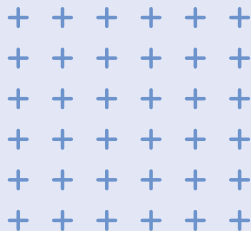
Dr. Paul Benson's



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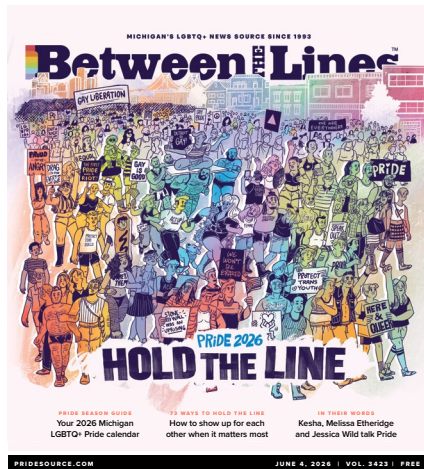


Illustration by Bill Ferenc

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# 5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

It's Pride Month in Detroit and there's so much going on: art, history, activism, country music, public joy and, yes, just the tiniest bit of rhinestone-fueled chaos. Want to learn about LGBTQ+ artists? Dance next to a mechanical bull? Hear the Indigo Girls sing their hearts out directly into your middle-aged feelings?

Get out that rainbow fanny pack and the cat-themed water bottle, dig your freedom rings out of the mothballs, apply some sunscreen and go take LGBTQ+ Michigan by the heart. We're waiting for you!



Christopher Street Detroit Rally, 1972. Courtesy photo

## Trace Detroit's Queer Past

Detroit has queer history everywhere, but much of it remains surprisingly untold and unacknowledged. Local historian Michael Boettcher's lecture, "Get Your Detroit Queer History Straight," explores everything from the city's first gay bar, Club Frontenac, to the thriving Palmer Park "gayborhood" era and the dozens of LGBTQ+ spaces that once shaped the city. Even better, it's happening at Gigi's, Detroit's oldest gay-owned and operated bar, which has spent decades serving as both community refuge and celebration space. Learning queer history inside a historic queer bar feels less like attending a lecture and more like receiving sacred knowledge from the gay ancestors themselves.

June 18, 6 p.m., Gigi's (16920 W. Warren Ave., Detroit). [bit.ly/detroitqueerhistory2026](https://bit.ly/detroitqueerhistory2026).



Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo: dia.org

## Uplift Queer Art

If you have ever wandered through the Detroit Institute of Arts thinking, "I wish someone would tell me which of these artists were gay and also why this painting makes me feel emotionally complicated," this lecture is for you. Hosted at the Sherwood Forest branch of the Detroit Public Library, "Art|Pride" highlights LGBTQ+ artists in the DIA collection and the ways queer artists have shaped modern and contemporary art while defying prejudice along the way. Also, free events at the library remain one of society's greatest bargains. Bring on the culture and air conditioning!

June 9, 6-7:30 p.m., Sherwood Forest Detroit Public Library (7117 W. Seven Mile Road, Detroit). [bit.ly/Artpride](https://bit.ly/Artpride).



Eastern Market. Photo: easternmarket.org

## Celebrate Queer Survival and Collective Action

Public art can do a lot of things: beautify a neighborhood, spark conversation or make you briefly consider becoming the kind of person who says "mural district" in casual conversation. "The Wave of Resilience," a new mural in Eastern Market by Camouflage, aims even higher by honoring Afro-Diaspora communities, HIV/AIDS advocacy and the decades-long work of advocate Odalys Martin.

Commissioner Jerron Totten describes the work as "more than a mural — it is a public celebration of Afro-Diaspora communities, HIV/AIDS advocacy and the leaders like Odalys who have carried this work forward for decades." The unveiling celebrates survival, care and collective action, which honestly sounds like the entire best history of queer community condensed onto one wall.

June 25, 11 a.m., Eastern Market (1520 Adelaide St., Detroit). [instagram.com/jerront](https://www.instagram.com/jerront).





HowdyFest. Photo: @klocko\_

## Wrangle Queer Joy

HowdyFest continues its important cultural mission of asking, "What if we honky tonk, but make it hella queer?" The fifth annual festival takes over the Old Miami with live music, drag, burlesque, BBQ, games, line dancing and a mechanical bull that will almost certainly humble at least six people by sunset. The event bills itself as "y'all-inclusive," which may be the most welcoming phrase in modern event marketing. Expect queer cowboys, queer punks, queer country fans and at least one person dressed like a disco armadillo. Even if you've never said "yeehaw" sincerely in your life, this might be your moment.

June 20, 5 p.m.-2 a.m., The Old Miami (3930 Cass Ave., Detroit). [bit.ly/queeryall](https://bit.ly/queeryall).



Indigo Girls. Photo: indigogirls.com

## Secure the Best Indigo Girls Tix Now

Some concerts are entertainment. Some are group therapy with C chords. The Indigo Girls returning to Michigan this fall with singer-songwriter Linda Perry of "4 Non Blondes" feels firmly in the second category. For decades, the duo has provided the soundtrack for queer longing, earnest road trips and emotionally significant Subaru ownership. If you've ever gotten teary-eyed at the newly college-graduated babydyke earnestly singing "Closer to Fine" at a coffee shop open mic, you are legally required to attend. So get your tickets now!

Sept. 17, 7 p.m., Meadow Brook Amphitheater (3554 Walton Blvd., Rochester Hills). [bit.ly/closer2fine](https://bit.ly/closer2fine).



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# *Hold the Line:* Designer Bill Ferenc on How His Cover Art Meets the Moment

The Detroit illustrator on protest history, queer legacy and making ‘art for good’

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Pride Source’s *Between The Lines*, the longest-running LGBTQ+ print publication in Michigan, is thrilled to feature the cover art for this issue by Bill Ferenc, a Detroit illustrator, the art director at The Black Sheep Agency and one of the warmest creative presences in the city’s queer arts scene.

I first got to know Bill through the Detroit Queer Sketch Series, where his eye for gesture and form — the way he finds life and personality in a single figure — was immediately apparent. He’s also the kind of artist who shows up for community in the most literal sense: If you’ve been to Drink & Draw at Dozer Coffee, you’ve probably drawn alongside him. When it came time to find an artist for our biggest issue of the year, Bill felt like the obvious choice. He’s someone who already understood, in his bones, what it means to make art that brings people together.

And that instinct shows in this cover. At a time when queer visibility is under sustained, deliberate pressure and attacks from multiple angles, Bill responded to this year’s theme, “Hold the Line,” with an illustration that is joyful and defiant in equal measure — a crowd marching forward, arms linked, signs raised, each figure moving in their own way but nobody left behind. It draws from the visual history of protest and the specific iconography of queer struggle, while still feeling unmistakably like home. Both the place and the feeling.

Below, Bill talks about the urgency of this moment, the protest history that shaped the piece, and why — for him — making art for good and showing up for community have always been the same thing.

**This Pride cover is landing in 2026, when queer visibility is increasingly under pressure. What felt most urgent to get across in your cover design, and what message or emotion were you hoping to evoke?**

We cannot take for granted the progress we’ve made and the battles that were won for our community. So many people have fought for these rights. Emphatically. Tenaciously. I think it’s important that we continue to show up and speak up for people who need it most, and that reach needs to extend to



Bill Ferenc. Courtesy photo

include the full spectrum of our identities. I wanted to capture a sense of unity while honoring our legacies. Arms linked. Hearts lifted. Don’t leave anyone behind.

**What was the starting point for this image? Was there a specific**

**feeling, moment or visual idea that everything else was built from?**

The strength of standing arm in arm felt central to the piece. I started with a large group of people in the middle and gradually worked out toward the edges. Along the

way, the image and movement took shape on its own. Everyone in the illustration is marching forward but doing so in a way that captures different attitudes and personalities. Some people are dancing. Some are sashaying. Others are stalwart. Everyone exhibits joy and resistance in





Detroit artist Bill Ferenc's early sketches that led to this issue's cover.

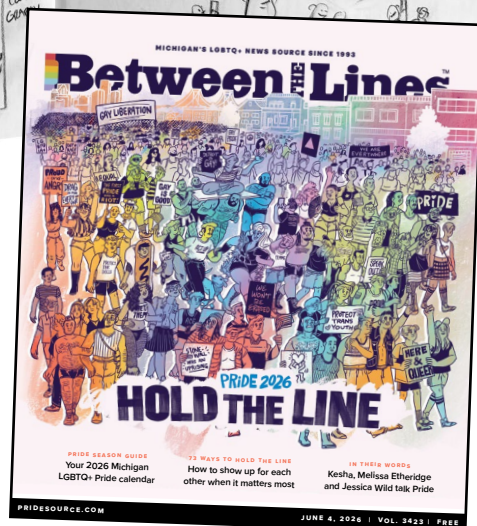
their own way. Maybe you're vocal. Or maybe you let your sign or your outfit do the talking. Anyone should feel comfortable to show up, be visible and present themselves in a way that honors their identity.

**The work pulls from protest histories and queer visual language. What references or images, consciously or not, did you consider while designing it?**

Protest signs were an important aspect of the piece. So looking through historical images for phrases and iconography was a starting point. I included a range of past and present, so you're seeing lots of messaging that has resonated throughout the years. I was hoping this could resemble any city at any period of time, but I also wanted to include some specific Detroit iconography to help it feel like home.

**Pride is both a celebration and a protest. How do you balance those two energies in your visual work, especially when designing for a public-facing platform like this cover?**

This illustration had to connect the past and present through moments of camaraderie and resistance. I think that meant it had to be honest about what our community has been through then and now: discrimination, hate, violence, Stonewall, "Silence = Death" and ACT UP, "Love Is Love," "Here and Queer. The words we've used to describe these moments carry power. The "we won't be erased" sign is an essential message in the piece. It's important that everyone acknowledges the hardship and celebrates



the liberation. If I can create an image that gives someone a reason to pause, reflect and find joy, it's striking the right balance.

**When you're not working on a specific assignment like this, what kind of illustration work do you naturally gravitate toward making?**

This project aligned with the core of my personal identity, so a lot of what I like to make is present here. I love drawing people in motion. I love capturing joy, celebration, community and connection. All shapes of bodies and all kinds of love. I grew up watching a lot of cartoons and reading newspaper comics, so a lot of those sensibilities carry into my work. A little bit of humor or an unexpected element, clues or curious moments that hint at a deeper story are always fun to include. During the day, I work as an art director and designer for The Black Sheep Agency, where I do branding and brand strategy for impact-based organizations and initiatives. The mission of the agency is to activate people around things that matter, so I work with organizations fighting for things like equal access to healthcare and education, reproductive rights, free and fair elections, and workers' rights. I do art and design for good.

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# At Pride and Beyond, 73 Ways to Hold the Line for Each Other

Small acts, shared snacks and practical magic for showing up when it matters most

BY KELLI DUNHAM  
ART BY BILL FERENC

We are living in a time when “holding the line” can sound very big and dramatic. To even consider taking action, it seems you’ll need a bullhorn, a legal team, a bunch of laminated signs and probably a minor in constitutional law. Sometimes that’s true. But more often, holding the line looks like something smaller. Maybe even — and we know this is edgy — less Instagram-worthy.

Sometimes holding the line during Pride season looks like simply remembering the people and stories that got us here. Or showing up. It looks like making things just a bit easier for someone else.

Occasionally, it looks like letting

someone do that for you. It’s not just defense. It’s also care. It’s joy. It’s logistics. It’s snacks. It’s always, always, always snacks.

Here are 73 ways to hold the line for each other this beloved Pride season. Some will take just a moment. Pick out a few that fit (metaphorically) in your rainbow-pin-covered fanny pack or that attach (metaphorically) to that rainbow lanyard. And if you invent a few more along the way, all the better.

**1.** Drive someone to an event they’re too nervous to attend alone.

2. Sit with the person who looks like they might leave early.
3. Also, don’t shame anyone for leaving early. You want to make staying possible, not mandatory.
4. Support queer-owned businesses in your neighborhood or area. Write an online review if they’re amazing.
5. Volunteer for Extremely Unglamorous shifts at Pride events. Ask the organizers, they’ll have something in mind. It might involve trash. And filth. But not the “Drag Race” kind.
6. Carry extra safety pins. They fix outfits and feelings.
7. It’s someone’s first Pride? Show up like it’s their wedding day. But better. If this is a milestone, treat it like one. Maybe bring flowers, or a onesie that says “Baby’s first dyke march.”
8. Or don’t make a big deal about it. Some folks just want to slide in under the glitter. Read the room.
- 9.** If reading the room isn’t your forte, ask.
10. Be patient with folks who can’t read the room.
11. If you’ve got the budget for it, throw in a pair of noise-canceling headphones to lend out.





Unexpectedly loud events can send people home long before they want to go.

12. Bring a portable dog dish of water to every occasion. Some pets really can't be left alone long.

**13.** If your friend has one of these aforementioned pets, but also that pet doesn't do well with glitter, loud noises or T-shirt cannons, offer to pet sit. Even a few hours make a difference. And they don't make noise-canceling headphones for dogs.

14. Invent noise-canceling headphones for dogs. Then start researching which queer mutual aid fund you're going to give all your money to. Because you're going to get very rich on July 3.
15. Engage in constructive, consensual matchmaking — as author Sarah Schulman once said, "If you're not helping someone find a girlfriend, you're not working towards the revolution."
16. Pay attention: Is this someone's first Pride since a break-up/death/pet death/job loss? They might be having feelings and need a little extra support.
17. Learn how to pronounce someone's name correctly and practice it until you get it right.
18. If you mess up, correct yourself without making it a whole performance.

**19.** Ask consent before posting photos of people, especially in queer spaces.

20. If someone says "don't tag me," don't tag them.
21. Keep an eye out for who hasn't eaten yet and gently point them toward the food.
22. Bring a portable phone charger and become briefly, wildly popular.
23. Learn where the quiet space is at events and let people know it exists.

**24.** Sit in the quiet space with someone who doesn't want to be alone but also doesn't want to talk.

25. Bring folding chairs or a blanket to outdoor events and share the seating wealth.
26. Introduce people by name and something they'd like to be known for ("This is Alex, they make incredible 3D printed vibrators").
27. If someone is new, check back in with them later in the event.

**28.** Learn a few grounding techniques (breathing, sensory stuff) and share them casually when useful. Someone is always going to need a little help with self-regulation.

29. Remind someone to drink water in a way that feels like care, not scolding.
30. Let your joy be visible. It gives other people permission.
31. Let your boundaries be visible too. Same reason.

**32.** Be the first to clap, cheer or snap at a performance. Start the ripple.

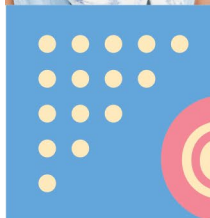
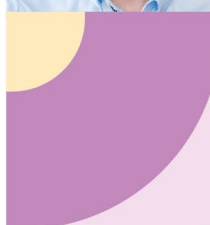
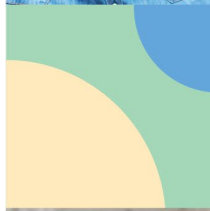
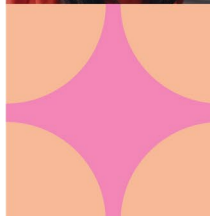
33. Help clean up at the end of an event.
34. Without being asked.
35. But stop if it turns out you're accidentally making chaos.

**36.** Thank the person who made the spreadsheet. There is always a spreadsheet person.

37. Ask "Do you want advice or just someone to listen?" before launching in.
38. Help someone brainstorm what to wear

See **Holding the Line**, page 19

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# DETROIT'S REALEST



Tiny Jag. Photo: Aaliyah Jackson

At her first Pride performance on June 7, rapper Tiny Jag is choosing authenticity over algorithms

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Tiny Jag does not seem particularly interested in becoming easier to package, which makes the rapper a perfect fit for Pride. For fans looking for queer art that feels fearless, deeply human and unapologetically Detroit, Tiny Jag's spot at Motor City Pride — her first-ever Pride as a performer — may be arriving at exactly the right moment.

Though she's "always been queer," when she hits the Pride Stage at 6 p.m. June 7, she promises the vibe will be "high energy," with "ludicrous" levels of "fuckery," which is how she describes the current phase of her career. She also hopes audiences experience something softer underneath the spectacle.

"Come ready to party," she says. "But there's gonna be a lot of love in there too. A lot of acceptance. A lot of inclusion."

Tiny Jag has spent more than a decade building a music career rooted in experimentation, emotional honesty and clever wordplay. But she has always been musical, originally drawn to the production aspects of creating music, especially the layering. She wrote her first verse in elementary school, strongly inspired by Trina's verse on the remix of Chingy's 2003 song "Right Thurr."

"That verse helped me realize my love for writing and delivery," she says. "I've lived 3,000 lives since then, but something always brings me back to music."

Those 3,000 lives led Tiny Jag here, all the way to the Pride stage and her current music career, which includes the 2025 single "Starbubu." Her albums include the 2018 mixtape "Polly" and the 2020 album "Wane."

Lauded for its "grungy and animated" delivery and "spunky ad-libs," her single, "Princess Angelou," was named "the must-hear rap song of the day" by Pitchfork. In the song, Jag references "Phenomenal Woman," a well-known poem by Maya Angelou. The song includes an open-hearted and direct description of her community — "All

your homeboys soft/my bitches tougher than jerky" — and goes on to playfully reference bubble gum tape and scurvy, juxtaposing two nouns that usually don't share a century, let alone a paragraph.

More lyrics full of the fierceness that has defined her career are sure to come after this power move: In 2025, Tiny Jag announced she would no longer release new music on Spotify and other major streaming platforms after learning more about those companies' ties to military and immigration-enforcement technology. For some artists, leaving major streaming platforms might feel impossible. For Tiny Jag, it felt unavoidable.

"I couldn't allow these songs I'm making up in my bed or in the shower to be streamlined into weapons that could be hurting people," she says.

The decision came from a physical reaction she has learned to trust.

"Once I found out this information and did my research, there was a pain in my shoulders and a tightness in my jaw," she says. "And a weakness that came into the rest of my body."

Tiny Jag describes those moments less as anxiety-producing and more as clarity-inducing.

"I truly believe this was God, this was the universe talking to me and letting me know where I belong, where I don't belong, when things have expired for me," she says.

The shift has practical consequences: Any new music Tiny Jag has released since the start of the year is routed only through her own site and SoundCloud. Sacrificing major platforms is a particularly difficult loss since she had been putting "so much blood, sweat and tears" into building through the platforms she is no longer using.

But what she has lost in easy reach, she is rebuilding as a direct relationship: handwritten notes, an upcoming group channel where fans can interact with her and a fan base she describes as "pieces of your puzzle," not just numbers.

"It takes up so much more time," she

See **Detroit's Realest**, page 48





# This Year, Everything Is On the Ballot

Michigan's LGBTQ+ community has real power to shape the state's future this November



BY JAY KAPLAN

Pride Month is here. Along with celebrating our authentic selves, I think of June as a time to celebrate how far we have come — and how far we still need to go.

Because of the tireless work by LGBTQ+ people and our allies, much progress has been made in Michigan and nationwide over the past decades. Sadly, we are now also experiencing continued and relentless attacks against the LGBTQ+ community from the White House on down.

This is particularly true for trans people, who have been facing targeted attacks by the Trump administration and politicians around the country who see them not as human beings, but rather use trans people as scapegoats with the intention to divide voters.

But we are far from helpless.

We can fight those cynical and destructive tactics by using the power of our collective voices at the polls in November. It will be a crucial election, with control of Michigan's executive and legislative branches as well as the U.S. Congress at stake.

Here's a rundown of offices on the November ballot, and the importance each one can have for the LGBTQ+ community.

## Michigan's Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State

For nearly eight years, we've seen the importance of, and benefited from, electing politicians who are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. Since taking office in 2019, our current governor, attorney general and secretary of state have all consistently taken actions that benefit queer people. To cite just one example of many for each office:

- The governor signed legislation making it clear that LGBTQ+ people cannot be discriminated against in employment, housing, education and public accommodations.
- An opinion issued by the attorney general resulted in Michigan-born transgender people being able to obtain a corrected birth certificate that accurately reflects their gender identity.
- The secretary of state adopted policies that allow residents to obtain state IDs that

See **ACLU**, page 40



# Emma's Wedding(s)

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## Eight Dems Give Trump More Power to Hurt Trans People



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I'm writing this on June 1, 2026, the first day of Pride. Pride Month is a time to celebrate LGBTQ+ people and history and to demand full protection of LGBTQ+ people under the law. It's also a great time for allies to be even more vocal about their support. (It should go without saying that if you're an ally then you're vocal about your support for LGBTQ+ people. If you're NOT vocal about your support then you aren't an ally. You're basically a nonplayer character, watching LGBTQ+ people fight anti-queer monsters from the sidelines. In other words, you're neutral, which is next to useless.)

Pride Month is also a great time to tell people who stand in the way of progress to fuck off. And I have a very specific list of eight folks, all Democratic U.S. Representatives, who deserve all of the expletives: Vicente Gonzalez and Henry Cuellar of Texas, Don Davis of North Carolina, Cleo Fields of Louisiana, Laura Gillen of New York, Marcy Kaptur of Ohio, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington and Eugene Vindman of Virginia.

What did these not-so-fine people o' Congress do to deserve this dishonor?

**Centrist Democrats, especially, seem to be more than willing to throw trans people in the trash in order to 'work with Republicans.'**

They all voted for H.R. 2616, the "Stopping Indoctrination and Protecting Kids Act," a bill that "would hand the Trump administration enormous leverage to strip federal funding from any school that 'teaches or advances concepts' related to transgender people" and would "require public schools to forcibly out transgender students to their parents before using their pronouns or chosen names," reports Erin Reed.

This bill passed the U.S. House by a vote of 217-198 with all Republicans voting for it and, you guessed it, the eight

mentioned Democrats joining them.

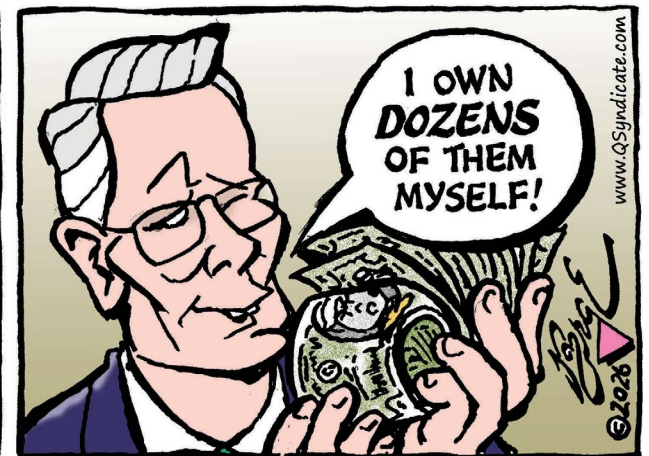
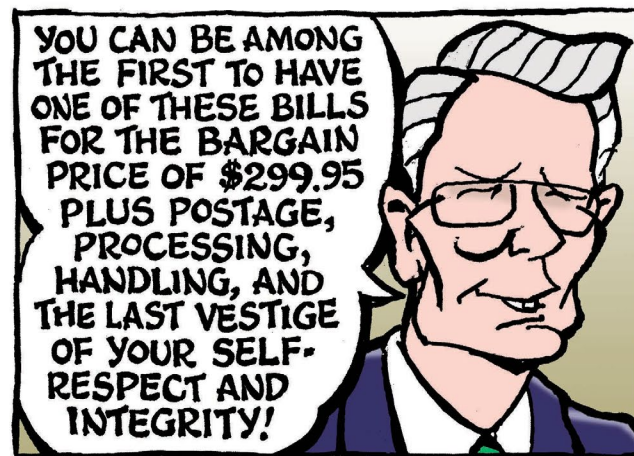
Now, even if these Democrats had not supported the bill, it still would have passed. The Republicans have a majority in the House, after all. But that's not the point. At issue here is the fact that these Democrats went out of their way to support a bill that would harm transgender people, including trans kids for no reason other than that they wanted to.

Reed points out that this is "the largest Democratic defection on any standalone anti-trans bill of this Congress."

Defection is an interesting word to use here because while Democrats are demonstrably better on the issue of transgender rights, they still aren't great. Centrist Democrats, especially, seem to be more than willing to throw trans people in the trash in order to "work with Republicans." Now, we know that Republicans, who believe that Democrats are literally evil, aren't going to help Democrats pass a damn thing. The Democrats, on the other hand, love to help Republicans pass legislation that hurts the very people who make up the Democratic

base, including supporting bills to fund ICE and continually voting in favor of Trump's nominees.

Still, support of H.R. 2616 is especially alarming. The right-wing rhetoric and dehumanization in the bill's title, "Stopping Indoctrination and Protecting Kids Act," is gross enough. Acknowledging the fact that transgender people not only exist but have the right to exist is not "indoctrination" and while kids need protection from a great many things, transgender people are not a danger to children.



On June 1, 2026, Rep. Vindman posted the following to Bluesky: "Happy Pride Month, Virginia! This month, we celebrate our LGBTQ+ neighbors and honor the progress we have made toward equality — while recognizing the continuing fight for justice and inclusion."

The overwhelming response was, essentially, WTF, dude? And not just from trans people.

"Hey just wanted to let you know that it's not just trans folk who are unhappy with your recent vote discriminating against them," wrote one user. "I'm an older straight woman who fully supports trans people."

"Middle age cis white male here," wrote another. "[Vindman] and every Democrat who voted for that hateful legislation are dead to me."

"I deeply regret donating money to your reelection," wrote a user with a trans son. "This hits very deeply."

Rep. Gillen's "Happy Pride Month" post on Instagram received similar responses with Reed herself posting, "You don't get to use our flag after the vote you took. For SHAME."

H.R. 2616 is headed to the Senate. "Senate Democrats blocked the federal trans sports ban earlier this year on a straight party-line vote, and the most likely fate of the 'Stopping Indoctrination and Protecting Kids Act' is that it dies on the same procedural wall," writes Reed.

But, Reed notes, the number of Democrats voting to hurt transgender people could very well grow.

Any Democrats going along with Trump's concerted effort to hurt trans people should, indeed, be ashamed. So they need to hear from folks, especially folks in their districts.

It's time to grab those bullhorns, take to social media, send some emails and make some phone calls. And if your representative didn't support this ugly bill, take a moment to thank them. Let them know you're watching.



THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Ferndale Pride Kicks Off Michigan's Summer of Joyful Defiance

Michigan's largest free LGBTQ+ festival landed on one of those perfect, sunny late-May days that feels like the universe is on your side. On May 30, West Nine Mile Road transformed into Ferndale Pride's 16th annual street fair, drawing a diverse, energized crowd through more than 220 vendor booths and beyond three stages of live entertainment running well into the evening.

Baddie Brooks, Miss Trans Michigan 2025, opened the day's ceremonies with a poem honoring trans icon Marsha P. Johnson — a

meaningful moment that set the tone early. Multi-award-winning artist Alise King headlined the Credit Union One Performance Stage at Planavon, while Zach Witness closed out the Woodward Dance Stage. In between, drag shows, emerging performers, kids' programming and a sensory quiet zone made sure something was happening for everyone.

Families, first-timers and longtime regulars packed the corridor from Woodward to Livernois, with proceeds benefiting Affirmations, Transgender Michigan, TGDetroit and other organizations doing essential work across the region.

Pride season is just getting started. Find dozens more festivals running through September in this issue of Between The Lines and online at [pridesource.com](https://pridesource.com).



Furry fun at Ferndale Pride. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

Ruth Ellis Center's 'Show Out' Brings Queer Artistry to St. Andrew's Hall

Ruth Ellis Center is bringing one of Detroit's most beloved Pride-season traditions to a bigger stage. "Show Out," an unapologetic showcase of queer artistry spanning ballroom, burlesque, comedy and drag, moves to the iconic St. Andrew's Hall for its June 13 production.

The event bills itself as a night for celebration, love and bravery, with every performer receiving flowers in a nod to timeless theater tradition. Proceeds support the Ruth Ellis Center's housing, health and wellness services for LGBTQ+ young people of color in Detroit. Tickets available at [ruthelliscenter.org](https://ruthelliscenter.org).

Pride Source Wins Five SPJ Detroit Awards

Pride Source and Between The Lines staff members brought home five Detroit Society of Professional Journalists awards for their 2024 coverage at an awards ceremony on Tuesday,

May 20, at the San Marino Club in Troy. Director of Content & Community Engagement Sarah Bricker Hunt took home four awards, sweeping the General News/Enterprise Reporting category and earning first place in Community/Local News Reporting for her series of features on Michigan's LGBTQ+ community. Judges praised Hunt for going beyond statistics and talking heads to earn the

kind of trust from her subjects that produced "genuinely transformative journalism." Executive Editor & Brand Director Chris Azzopardi earned third place in Feature Reporting for his in-depth look at the 53-year legacy of Grand Rapids' Apartment Lounge.

Pride Source competed in Print Class C, the division for non-daily publications. Read all the winning stories at [pridesource.com](https://pridesource.com).

Teen Pride Prom Comes to Howell

Queer Families of Livingston is throwing a "Fire and Ice" Pride Prom for teens at the Howell Opera House on June 12 — because every queer kid deserves a night where they're the main character. The event is open to ages 12-19 with dancing, music, games, prizes and photo opportunities from 6:30-9:30 p.m. Find details at [qflivco.org](https://qflivco.org).

Support Trans Survivors This Pride Month

Detroit's Inner Justice Works, a sliding-scale trauma therapy practice, is fundraising this Pride Month to help fill a critical gap in services for transgender survivors of violence. Research shows 36% of trans survivors stay with an abuser because they have no other housing options — exactly the crisis that longtime Detroit organizer and trans clinician Lance Hicks, LMSW-C, built the practice to address. Donate at [bit.ly/innerjusticeworks](https://bit.ly/innerjusticeworks).

Madonna Collabs with Grindr for 'Confessions II'

Mother is on Grindr. Ahead of the July 3 release of "Confessions II," Madonna has taken over the app with exclusive content and limited-edition drops — debuting with her profile appearing right in users' grids. Tapping it opens a voice memo: "Hi Grindr, it's mother. I wanted to go where the hottest action was, so I got on the grid." The album reunites her with producer Stuart Price, who shaped the club-driven sound of the 2005 original.



Madonna. "Confessions II" album art



# For Jessica Wild, Every Pride Is a Revolution

‘Drag Race’ veteran on why Detroit’s Pride stage is exactly where she belongs



Jessica Wild. Courtesy photo

BY KEITH LANGSTON

Drag superstar Jessica Wild is (potentially) about to celebrate her first Pride in the Motor City. “This is my first Pride performance in Michigan,” the dynamic queen says before pausing and adding with a laugh, “At least I think it is. You get a little lost when you’ve been on the road for as many years as I have. But I’m almost certain this will be my first time celebrating Pride in Michigan!”

That sums up Wild pretty well. Both hilarious and endearing, her off-the-cuff style draws you in and makes you feel like you’re hanging with an old friend. But on top of her humor, Wild is also known for her commanding stage presence. Now, she’s set to light up Detroit’s Pride Stage at 3 p.m. June 7 during Motor City Pride.

Originally from Caguas, Puerto Rico, Wild has been performing in drag for almost 30 years, eventually even sashaying her way onto the second season of “RuPaul’s Drag Race” in 2010, where she placed sixth. But she really flaunted her talents in 2023 when she returned for the eighth season of “All Stars.” She quickly became a fan favorite, and also the top pick for Bianca Del Rio, who was hosting the show’s companion talk series “The Pit Stop” during that season. Thanks to her outlandish outfits and fantastic lip syncs, Wild made it all the way to the final three, proving that 13 years after debuting on the show, her talents had only grown stronger.

BTL caught up with Wild to chat about trying her hand at comedy and rock music, Pride, the importance of drag and whether she’d ever consider another run on “Drag Race.”

**You’ve been doing drag for**

**almost 30 years now. You were performing before “Drag Race,” during the show’s rise to fame, and now, in this era where drag is both mainstream and popular, but also demonized. What’s it been like to see so many societal shifts happen throughout your career?**

Drag has always been a political movement and art form that’s rejected by conservatives and people who don’t agree with our lives and our art. I think the main difference is that now drag is more mainstream, and with the rise of social media and with the current government, the attacks seem more intense. Definitely more now than when I started doing drag. But being able to do drag this long, and to be a part of the evolution of “Drag Race,” has been a privilege and something I wouldn’t change for nothing.

**With the amplified discrimination, do you think that’s also amplified the importance and the need for drag?**

The community has been under attack for as long as I can remember. We’ve been fighting for our rights since forever. But I think the attacks have gotten more intense. For me, I want to show that drag is not a crime, it’s a celebration. It’s something that brings people together and brings joy in dark moments. I think it’s important to keep the strength and to keep showing up. Sometimes, I might feel a little bit scared to go to some places, but then I’m like, no, this is my art and this is who I am, so I have to go.



Most people probably know you because of “Drag Race.” I imagine that for a drag queen, getting on the show must be absolutely career-altering.

Absolutely. I take nothing about it for granted. I worked so hard, so when I got the call for Season 2, it was a huge opportunity to show the world who I am. The question of how drastically my life changed from the show is a question I could write an entire book about.

Is it true you got on that season because they had a promotion where people voted for you online?

Yes, but also, it seemed more like they kind of knew they wanted me already. I kept getting calls from the producers, and I remember thinking, “This is weird, it seems like they really want me.” I think they knew they wanted me from the beginning. But I did get a lot of love from fans online during the voting process.

What was it like being on TV?

Oh my god, wild! I was in a Subway one time getting a sandwich, and this big group of straight guys came on top of me, and I was like, I think they’re gonna attack me. I was actually scared. But then they were like, “Hey, aren’t you the Puerto Rican queen from that drag show?” Then they were like, ‘Oh my god, we watch that show!’

Would you ever consider competing on the show again?

Now... [pauses] I think the

“For anyone who already knows Jessica Wild, they know I’m gonna bring high-energy numbers and lots of fun. I want you to sing with me, to feel happy, and to celebrate Pride and who we are.”

answer is yes. A few years ago, if someone asked, I probably would have said no with all my heart, because it’s a lot. People have no idea. Only the girls who have been through it know. I think that if I had been sent home early, I would have wanted to try again. But I felt like I did everything, and that I achieved my goals and didn’t have anything else to prove.

But when that Season 11 “All Stars” promo came out, I felt a flame inside of me. Like, I think I want to go back. Tonight we’re even having a party to celebrate April Carrion, because she’s one of my sisters and she’s back on TV. It’s very special, and I’d love to go through that again.

I would love to see you back on “Drag Race,” and I hope it happens! I also know you

have tons of gigs coming up, including some in Hong Kong, and even a special appearance at Motor City Pride here in Michigan. What can people expect if they come to see you at Pride?

For anyone who already knows Jessica Wild, they know I’m gonna bring high-energy numbers and lots of fun. I want you to sing with me, to feel happy, and to celebrate Pride and who we are. My goal is just to give a lot of love.

What was your first Pride like?

My first Pride was in San Juan, Puerto Rico. When I came out of the closet, I came out to my mom first. Then I came out to



Jessica Wild. Courtesy photo

my dance teacher, who I call my father in the drag world and the gay world. I was 17, and my drag father told me to wait until I was 18, then said, “OK, let’s do it.” So he took me to my first Pride. I felt protected because I was there with him, and it allowed me to just experience it all. I was like, wow, this is amazing. To see that I wasn’t alone in the world. To see

everyone out in the streets having a good time. It was like couples, families and friends. It was very special.

I also remember my first New York Pride, which really opened my eyes. In Puerto Rico, it was more of a family situation, but in

See **Jessica Wild**, page 50

# Michigan Advance

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Kesha during The Freedom Tour. Photo: Emma McIntyre / Getty Images Entertainment

# Kesha: Horny for Life

The pop icon talks Pride, queerness and why The Freedom Tour is for us

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Kesha has always made music for the ones who don't quite fit — the glitter-covered misfits, the too-loud, the still-figuring-it-out. You know, the animals, as she calls them.

So it feels like more than coincidence that she's rolling into Pine Knob on June 5, right in the thick of Pride Month, with The Freedom Tour and "Origami!," a new single that is unashamedly horny and campy and completely unbothered.

In this conversation — one of her most candid — Kesha talks about what it actually means to be queer, and how long it took to figure that out. She reflects on growing up in Nashville, dragging her mom from church to church looking for a community that didn't come with conditions and eventually finding her people at a punk rock drag bar in California. And she talks about what, after that search, it feels like to now stand on a stage with a Pride flag behind her and a whole sea of queer people in front of her.

The Freedom Tour arrives on the heels of 2025's "(Period)," her sixth studio album — released on July 4th, on her own label, Kesha Records. Independence, in every sense of the word. If "Rainbow" was the album she made for her future self, a promise that one

day she'd be happy and free, well. Here we are.

**I want to start by acknowledging that your whole career has been dedicated to making space for the weirdos and outsiders of the world.**

I love that. I've always felt like there's a part of myself that was not totally socially acceptable, not totally normal, not totally perfect, always reinventing, a little bit messy, needed a little bit of work. I've never felt truly perfect and ready to go.

**Hearing you say that makes me think of your song "Spaceship," from the "Rainbow" album. I listen to that song and it reminds me of being a kid and it gives me the feeling that I felt when I was 10 years old and didn't fit in.**

Honestly, I love that song and I love that you're pulling out a deep cut. That song means so much to me.

**I'm sure it means a tremendous amount to a lot of your queer following.**

My god, I hope so. I hope the whole catalog is for us. And I just think back to when I was

in high school and I remember being in a marching band and being like, "I just don't feel the same as everybody else, and I can't be the only one that feels like this, but I don't know how to connect to my people. Where are my people? I must have people out there, but where are they?"

**Do you know when you put your finger on your queerness? Did it take a while?**

Well, I grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, so we're talking the South. And I would be obsessed with this community and connection to something bigger than myself. I loved all of that. And then when it would get to the point in the church where being queer or loving someone of the same sex was a sin, I'd be like, "You're losing me here because how can love of any type be against God? God is love." It doesn't make sense to me, and so I would literally make my mom drive me from church to church. I had my first kiss at a superchurch. And then one summer in high school, instead of having a summer, I went to Columbia University in New York and studied religion and psychology behind religion because I just couldn't figure

See **Kesha**, page 38





# Ready to **STAND UP** to corporate greed and billionaire rule?

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We are in a defining moment when it comes to pursuing that vision.

Corporate greed has run rampant, and the billionaire class is on the march. The working class is under attack. But make no mistake, the UAW is fighting back—across industries, across communities, and across the country.

This fight is not new, but we are waging it with renewed strength. Working people refuse to settle for scraps while CEOs hoard billions—and go after even more by gutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other vital programs.

We demand a living wage, health care as a right, dignified retirement, and the ability to live beyond the job. These are not radical ideas—they are the foundation of the American Dream.

And that Dream goes beyond the workplace. We fight for dignity on and off the job. For all people. No matter your skin color, your religion, or who you love.

The divide-and-conquer politics of the billionaires is a tired strategy, but it's effective. The wealthy pit workers against each other by race, by gender, by nationality, to keep us divided and weak.

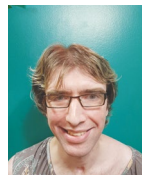
**Our answer is solidarity.**





# NAVIGATION BY NORTH STAR

One nonbinary writer on leaving the map behind and learning to navigate by feel



**BY ASTER ASEM**

**I** sometimes sleep so deeply that it takes some seconds after waking to remember who I am and what's happening in my life. Recently, during one such “reload,” I realized how much I had changed and was still changing in the year or so since realizing that I wasn’t cisgender. I looked in the bathroom mirror at my hair, dyed

and longer than it had ever been; my face, clean shaven despite my eternal distaste for my chin; and the person behind my eyes — who were they?

It had been about 18 months since my “hatching.” I was raised to be conservative and Catholic and had never realized I could be anything but a boy — or, for 16 years, a man. I had copied without question my parents’ worldview: good and evil, conservatives and liberals, men and women — all defined and immutable categories.

But I noticed contradictions within their scripture and strictures. I could ignore only so many of them, and I couldn’t fathom how harmless actions between consenting adults could be evil. As Catholic guilt made me feel unworthy of life and terrified of death, either it or I had to go. And so, I threw it away like childish things.

Beliefs that facts could not sustain shriveled and fell away, and new growths replaced them. I discovered the YouTube channel “One Topic At A Time,” whose

giggly, wholesome readings of LGBTQ+ memes introduced me to queer joy. I discovered I was bi or pansexual, and for the first time, I questioned my gender.

Was I a man? What was masculinity? No personality trait, I realized, was exclusive to one gender. And so, it dawned on me that gender was bunk, at least insofar as rigid categorization. I texted my BFF and came

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See **North Star**, page 42



## ◀ Holding the Line

Continued from page 9

to an event they're excited and nervous about.

**39.** Carry naloxone (Narcan). Know how to use it.

40. Send memes as a form of emotional first aid. Especially to folks who are millennials and younger.

41. When planning the potluck, don't just think about allergies and preferences. Consider textures as well.

42. Let someone show up like a mama bear for you. Receiving help counts.

43. Take pictures of your friends looking like themselves.

44. Send those pictures immediately so they have proof on a rough day.

45. Tell people what you appreciate about them.

46. Notice who isn't in the room and ask why.

**47.** Bring your loudest guffaw to local shows, readings and open mics. Laughter is a contribution too.

48. Feed people. It doesn't have to be fancy.

49. Accept food when it's offered to you. This is also community care.

50. Make art about being alive right now and share it.

51. Tip the drag performer like your rent depends on it. Because their rent might!

52. Check in on your strongest friend.

53. Check in on your funniest friend.

54. Check in on the person who always says they're fine.

55. Offer to sit on Zoom while someone cleans their room or answers an email they've been avoiding for seven weeks.

56. Or goes no contact with that terrible ex.

57. Send a "no need to respond/this comes without social obligation" check-in text so someone can feel cared for without having to perform.

58. Always carry straws (paper, please — the otters and sea lions say "thank you") so that your favorite drag queen or other highly lipsticked person can stave off dehydration.



59. Make space when you realize you're taking up a lot of it.

60. Take a road trip to attend a few smaller Pride events in greater Michigan. You're statistically less likely to run into an ex you're avoiding or that former roommate who always left jelly marks in the peanut butter.

61. Use your boring privileges (steady job, stable housing, supportive family) to take risks when you can.

**62.** Offer to go to a medical appointment with someone.

See **Holding the Line**, page 21

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# Your 2026 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

Dozens of fests, one fabulous Michigan Pride season

BY KELLI DUNHAM

It's Pride time again, beloved LGBTQ+ folks and queers of every (and any!) gender.

And yes, we know — you are, in fact, proud all year 'round. But there is something particularly necessary (maybe even medicinal) about pausing the collective doomscroll for a minute to celebrate the freedoms we still have, the communities we've built and the glitter-forward resilience that continues to keep us here, alive, hydrated and slightly sunburned.

One of the true perks of life in our beloved Mitten State is that we are not scraping together one or two events and calling it a season. We have dozens of independent Pride celebrations, each with its own vibe, scale and very real potential for you to leave with something unexpected — from a cute temporary dolphin tattoo to a life decision your future self will have very strong opinions about.

If miles of packed street festival energy makes you want to lie down in a dark room, then sure, the glorious chaos of Ferndale Pride might not be your scene. But there is absolutely a smaller, chillier, bring-a-lawn-chair option with your name on it. Or a lakeside one. Or one where you accidentally learn something. Or one where you mostly just eat kettle corn and feel feelings.

Despise all things drag? Well. That does narrow the field. But we respect your journey.

The point is: Your Pride flavor is out there. It might require a little driving, a little planning and at least one emergency snack stop. But we promise, it will be worth it.

Or at least it will be a good story.

Help us keep our calendar up to date! Email [sarah@pridesource.com](mailto:sarah@pridesource.com) with details about fests we're missing.

*Single-day events are in chronological order, alphabetized by date. Multi-day events are placed in the calendar in the order of the earliest event.*



## JUNE

**Friday, June 5**

### Ironwood Pride

**Pride UP Festival Picnic in the Park** (on June 6)

**City Square Park** (101 W. Aurora St., Ironwood), noon-5 p.m.

[ironwoodareapride.com](http://ironwoodareapride.com)

Don't sleep on the Upper Peninsula this Pride season. Unless it's napping in a hammock between events! The UP's smaller Pride celebrations are packed with big heart, small-town charm and a truly inspiring ratio of glitter to population.

Take Ironwood, perched way up at the UP's western edge, where they're throwing their sixth annual Pride fest like the pros they are. Not all the events have been announced, but keep your eye on

their Instagram for the most up-to-date details. And check them out all year round for activities leading up to Pride; they partner with the community for warm-up events like Fruity Yoga, a community-born musical and even a punk rock prom held (as God intended) at an Episcopal Church.

### Kalamazoo Pride (through June 6)

**Arcadia Creek Festival Place** (145 E. Water St., Kalamazoo), 6 p.m.-midnight and Saturday, June 6, 2 p.m.-midnight

[outfrontkzoo.org/pride](http://outfrontkzoo.org/pride)

Kalamazoo Pride 2026 is once again taking over Arcadia Creek Festival Place with the sparkle fully back and working overtime. Friday night opens strong with theater and dance, then builds to the main event: the Mx./Ms./Mr. Kalamazoo Drag Pageant with Monique

Madison, show director and host, as well as 2025's Ms Kalamazoo Pride, Jade Harmony.

Saturday is your classic "wander, learn, acquire small joyful objects" situation — browse vendors, snag a few pronoun pins, actually read the info at community resource tables (growth!) and run into 12 of your closest exes.

The festival supports the year-round offerings from Outfront Kalamazoo, including their crucial mental health navigation services, queer craft nights, family events, LGBTQ+ career services and help with getting identification. Stay for the weekend. Let the glitter fix what it can.

**Saturday, June 6**

### Community Pride Michigan (Saugatuck-Douglas)

**Parade:** Saugatuck High School (401 Elizabeth St., Saugatuck), 10:30 a.m.

**Pride in the Park:** Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

[communitypridemi.org](http://communitypridemi.org)

Community Pride Michigan does not just tip their collective toes into Pride — they do a full cannonball. You need to see their entire list of events to believe it, but let's just say if you've been waiting with rainbow-bated breath to participate in your first (openly) queer Pickleball Tournament, you are in luck. Don't miss the Pride Putt Putt, an author event, plus a tea dance and a paddle cruise. Music from Sixteen Candles and Hello Weekend.

### Keweenaw Pridefest

**Calumet Colosseum** (110 Red Jacket Road, Calumet), 1-5 p.m.

[keweenawpridefest.org](http://keweenawpridefest.org)

Keweenaw Pridefest is hosting a day of lawn games, live music and community tables that they're calling "More than just a party. It's a celebration of being queer and overcoming adversity."

### Meridian Pride

**Marketplace on the Green** (1995 Central Park Drive, Okemos), 5-10 p.m.

[meridian.mi.us/about-us/calendar/meridian-pride-event](http://meridian.mi.us/about-us/calendar/meridian-pride-event)

Meridian's fourth annual Pride is back to early June. Check out the township website for updates on performers and more.

See **Pride Calendar**, page 22



63. Stay with them after the appointment, too. That's often when the feelings show up.

**64.** Learn what your asexual and aromantic friends actually want and respect it. But maybe ask it differently than “what do you actually want?”

65. Offer to help someone make a petty coloring book about their ex. Healing comes in many forms.

**66.** If a friend's recovery path isn't working, help them find other options without judgment.

67. Celebrate harm reduction. White-knuckling still counts as surviving.

**68.** Remind your friends they are allowed to rest, not just endure.

69. Normalize changing your mind when you learn something new.

70. Interrupt jokes that punch down, even when it's awkward. Especially when it's awkward.

71. Follow up after someone says they're struggling. Not just once.

72. Keep showing up. Not perfectly. Not always gracefully. But consistently.

**73.** Don't disappear. Your friends need you. We need you. We all need you.



**June 5**

**Loons**

**PRIDE NIGHT**



**June 20**

**Mt. Pleasant**

**PRIDE FEST**

**Drag Show**

**AFTER PARTY**

Adults 18+



**June 27**

**GREAT LAKES BAY**

**PRIDE**

**Festival**

**Drag Show**

**AFTER PARTY**

Adults 18+





**Learn More!**



**Lowell Pride**

**Lowell Riverwalk**, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
*lowellpride.org*

**Motor City Pride (Detroit)**

**Festival:** Saturday, June 6, Hart Plaza, 1-9 p.m., and Sunday, June 7, 12:30-7 p.m.  
**Parade:** Sunday, June 7, noon. Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza.

*motorcitypride.org*

With the theme “Unshaken: Rooted in Pride, Leading in Love,” Motor City Pride returns to Hart Plaza June 6-7. Michigan’s largest LGBTQ+ celebration (tickets required) spreads across the Pride Stage, Pyramid Stage and Dance Stage, wrapping Sunday with the traditional Pride parade stepping off at noon from Fort and Griswold streets through downtown Detroit.

The Pride Stage Saturday headliner is Jai Rodriguez (“Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” “Stop! That! Train!”), with performer Baddie Brooks (Miss Trans Michigan 2025) opening the ceremony in her Motor City Pride debut. Also on the Saturday Pride Stage: The KB, The Science Fair, Better Love, Sabin’s Drag Show and Pole Starz DET. Sunday’s Pride Stage features “RuPaul’s Drag Race” Season 16 contestant Mhi’ya Iman Le’Paige, Season 2 veteran Jessica Wild (“All Stars 8”), Detroit rapper Tiny Jag, multi-award-winning artist Alise King, PRISM Chorus and Sophie Grey.

On the Dance Stage, Stacey Hotwaxx Hale (Detroit’s Godmother of House) anchors Saturday, joined by Brooke Steele, LadyMonix, Rimarkable and Ashton Swinton. Sunday features Weisman, Anti and Tylr\_. The Pyramid Stage spotlights local and regional talent both days, with a Strut Honey Fashion Show Sunday afternoon.

**Muskegon Pride**

**Hackley Park** (350 W. Webster Ave., Muskegon), 11 a.m.-6 p.m.  
*muskpride.org*

The Muskegon Pride Festival organizers can’t wait to greet us on rainbow-studded streets, so plan your calendars around the festival at Hackley Park, with tables, vendors and entertainment to be announced soon! If you can’t wait until June to get your Pride on, check out their ongoing programming including Coffee With



Friends, Golden Years Lunches and a weekly all-ages transgender, genderqueer and gender nonconforming social group.

**Village Pride**

**Village Biergarten** (1420 Van Dyke St., Detroit), 2-8 p.m.  
*instagram.com/village\_pride\_detroit*

Detroit’s West Village and Indian Village neighborhoods join forces for the annual Village Pride fest, featuring DJs, a fashion show, voguers and vendors, all in support of Ruth Ellis Center.

**Saturday, June 13**

**East Lansing Pride**

**Albert El Fresco** (Albert Ave. between Grove Street and M.A.C. Ave.), 4-9 p.m.  
*cityofeastlansing.com/2548/East-Lansing-PRIDE*

This year, East Lansing Pride is bringing back their legendary open floor drag show, live music, more than 50 local vendors and, of course, drag story time!

**Flat River Pride**

**Black Field** (201 W. Judd St., Greenville), 11 a.m.-7 p.m.  
*eventbrite.com/o/107208455491*

Could anything be more lovely for our little literary nerd hearts than a Pride event co-sponsored by

a library? Flat River Pride is just that! Join Flat River Community Library and the Voices of Flat River Pride in an intentionally ally-friendly afternoon at Black Field. Organizers promise music, vendors, community resource tables and activities, including activities for the kids! If you’ll be enjoying yourself at one of the dozens of other Pride events this Saturday, consider checking out other events Flat River Pride is organizing, including mentor training, coffee hours and their cheekily named Gay Pizza Mondays.

**Grand Haven Pride**

**Lynn Sherwood Waterfront Stadium** (1 N. Harbor Drive, Grand Haven), noon-TBD  
*ghpride.org/festival*

Grand Haven Pride is returning for its fourth year and is still seeking (you guessed it) food and other vendors, as well as a few enthusiastic volunteers to make the whole event work. Too much commitment? You can sign up for their email newsletter just so you can keep track of all the going-ons.

**Michiana PrideFest (Niles)**

**Tyler Fields** (1329 Lake St., Niles) 10 a.m.- 6 p.m.  
*outcenter.org/pridefest*

This year’s Michiana PrideFest has

the folks at OutCenter Southwest Michigan announcing a community field day with a brand-new home at Tyler Fields! If your queer heart is aching for the softball fields of your youth (or that catcher on your high school team who never quite understood what version of the game she wanted to play), don’t miss the outdoor happenings. And also, don’t forget the sunscreen for your brand new tattoo.

**Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride (Marquette)**

**Mattson Lower Harbor Park** (200 N. Lakeshore Blvd.), noon-11 p.m.  
*uprainbowpride.org/events*

UP Pride is turning 11 this year and they’re back with entertainment, art activities and, of course, pasties (the kind you wear and the kind you eat). They haven’t announced all the performers yet, but in the meantime, you don’t even have to leave your house to be inspired by UP Pride; visit their online wall of affirmations at the URL above.

**Warren City Pride**

**Warren Civic Center** (1 City Square, Warren), noon-8 p.m.  
*warrencitypride.com*

Warren City Pride is a great Pride event for folks with younger kids as they ask all entertainers to sign a “hey I promise I’m going to perform for all ages” affidavit in order to perform at the festival. See you

there, rainbow family folks!

**Sunday, June 14**

**Plymouth Pride**

**Old Village Neighborhood** (Liberty Street, Plymouth), 2-6 p.m.  
*oldvillageplymouth.com/pride*

Liberty Street in Plymouth will be closed for the third annual Pride event (how time flies!) and converted into a fabulous, fun space for all. Check out the vendors, resource tables and, of course, an amazing Pride stage with DJ Whitney Who! and drag performers all afternoon.

**Saturday, June 20**

**Cass County Pridefest**

**Library Pavilion** (206 Main St., Dowagiac) 4-8 p.m.  
*outcenter.org/cass-county-pridefest*

Cass County Pridefest is one sparkling stop on the Pridefest On Tour trifecta, dreamed up by the fine folks at OutCenter of Southwest Michigan. More information on entertainment coming soon!

**Downriver Pride (through June 21)**

**Downtown Wyandotte**, June 20, noon-11 p.m., June 21, noon-8 p.m.  
*downriverpride.com*

Downriver Pride is bringing two full days of joy, glitter-adjacent energy and the kind of community that makes you text someone, “You should’ve come.” Plus, food that understands the assignment (come hungry, leave with zero regrets) and entertainment TBA but definitely TBRA (To Be Really Amazing).

**Fenton Pride**

**Rackham Park** (150 S. Leroy St.), 1-5 p.m.  
*fentonpride.org*

The heart of Fenton Pride lives in Rackham Park with the Fenton Pride Collective, vendors and community orgs, but the fun doesn’t stop there. Local downtown businesses are also getting in on the action, offering sweet discounts and special Pride-themed food and drinks. New this year, organizers have added another warm-up event called Drag Me to Bingo, which probably won’t require you to drag any of your friends there. Food, drinks and prizes are promised!





# Looking for an LGBTQ+ friendly doctor?

Visit [corewellhealth.org/find-a-doctor](https://corewellhealth.org/find-a-doctor) and search for 'LGBTQ Health' for our list.



Corewell Health is hiring! Visit [corewellhealth.org/careers](https://corewellhealth.org/careers) for information or to apply.



[battlecreekpride.org](https://battlecreekpride.org)

**DJ CLUBKID**  
Host & MC

# 2026 Festival

**Saturday July 18th**  
11am-8pm Leila Arboretum

- Kids Area!!
- Petting zoo by
- Over 10 Food Trucks!
- Over 80 Vendors!
- Drag show produced by The Kalamazoo Kittens
  - Drag show produced by Baby Boi
- Live Music from *SWEETIE* & *NH Nikki Holland & the Dirty Elizabeths*
- Territorial Brewing Beer Garden
- 18+ After Party



Also, Fenton Pride Collective put out a few episodes of a podcast last summer, so while you wait for Pride Month, you can catch up on what happened last summer!

## Grand Rapids Pride (through June 21)

**Calder Plaza** (320 Ottawa Ave. NW, Grand Rapids). June 20, noon-10 p.m., June 21, noon-8 p.m.

[grpride.org/pride-festival](http://grpride.org/pride-festival)

Grand Rapids Pride Festival is back to being free (and therefore ungated, so make sure you check out their detailed access page for more information) and they can't wait to welcome everyone for the now two-day festival. Join the party, as West Michigan comes out (again!) to celebrate radical joy, community and the beautiful messiness of queer interconnectedness.

GR Pride packs Calder Plaza with over 150 vendors, food trucks galore, all-ages activities, a sensory space and performers TBA.

## Livonia Pride

**Schoolcraft College** (18600 Haggerty Road, Livonia), 11 a.m.- 2 p.m.

[livoniapride.org](http://livoniapride.org)

Livonia Pride is back and ready to party in their newish (as of 2025) spot — Schoolcraft College! While the entertainment lineup is still under wraps (ooh, mysterious!), it looks like their social media presence is probably the best way to keep up to date. Show this big-hearted little Pride some love.

## Mount Pleasant Pride

**Broadway Park** (2451 Nish Na Be Anong Road), 2-5 p.m.

[greatlakesbaypride.org/regional-pride-celebrations/#mt-pleasant-pride-fest](http://greatlakesbaypride.org/regional-pride-celebrations/#mt-pleasant-pride-fest)

Mount Pleasant Pride has all their rainbow ducks in a row, so come prepared to hang out, be exactly who you are and maybe eat something fried out of a truck while you're at it. You can greet folks from the newly established Michigan Two Spirit and Indigiqueer Coalition, shop at booths from local 2SLGBTQIA+ vendors, peruse community partner resources and enjoy an after-party in the form of a drag show.

## Saturday, June 27

## Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival (Saginaw)

**Jolt Credit Union Event Park** (300 Johnson St., Saginaw), 11 a.m.- 6 p.m.

[greatlakesbaypride.org](http://greatlakesbaypride.org)

The Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival is a free, family-friendly outdoor fest that brings together LGBTQ+ folks, allies, chosen family and supportive humans from all over the region. You'll find retail vendors, community resources, live entertainment, health screenings and a full-on kids' activity zone (because little queers and future allies deserve fun too).

## Holland Pride

**Kollen Park** (240 Kollen Park Drive, Holland), 1-6 p.m.

[outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride](http://outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride)

Out On The Lakeshore seems tickled pink (tickled rainbow?) to be bringing back Holland Pride to Kollen Park. You can spend the afternoon soaking up fabulous entertainment, tasty bites from food trucks, awesome merch, helpful resources and fun for every age — from toddlers to chosen aunties. Don't forget about their other offerings during Pride week: a fiber fest, an open mic night at the library and a 100 percent disco-themed ball!

## Lansing Pride

**Old Town** (216 Cesar E. Chavez Ave.), 1-9 p.m.

[lansingpride.org](http://lansingpride.org)

Lansing Pride is Mid-Michigan's biggest celebration, and that Mid-Michigan energy refuses to stay politely contained in a single weekend. It all kicks off June 3 with a Pride Flag-raising ceremony — because if certain folks would rather not see it flying at places like Stonewall National Monument, Lansing will simply raise a few more and call it community service (and yes, be a

little cranky about it). From there, it's a joyful sprint: multiple days of pageants, drag shows in various states of fabulousness and a white party where you will absolutely see at least one outfit that makes you reconsider your entire wardrobe. All roads lead to the big Pride Festival on June 27, packed with all-day entertainment, local and national talent and a few delightful surprises.

## Monroe County Pride

**St. Mary's Park** (111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe), 1-7 p.m.

[monroecountypride.org](http://monroecountypride.org)

Monroe County Pride is bringing together local drag, resources, food trucks, an art

# Baddie Brooks Is Back — and Ready for Her Biggest Stage Yet

## The Detroit musician will perform at Motor City Pride June 6

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Baddie Brooks has had a lot of firsts. The first Black trans woman from Detroit to serve as Grand Marshal at the NYC Pride March in 2024. One of the first Michigan artists to fuse house, pop and R&B into a sound that feels distinctly, defiantly her own. And this summer, for the first time, she'll take the stage at Motor City Pride — opening for original "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" star Jai Rodriguez at 5 p.m. on Saturday, June 6, at Hart Plaza in Detroit.

That she's performing at all is something of a triumph.

Last fall, Brooks was mid-performance at a drag show when she went into a split and heard her bones crunch on impact. She dislocated her knee — it popped out of place and, inexplicably, back in without medical intervention. Her MRI revealed a sprained LCL and fragments of broken bone and cartilage floating around the joint. For two months, she couldn't walk.

"For me, it's kind of hard to sit still," she said recently. "Two months felt like two years."

Brooks has been easing back in with pop-up appearances at local bars like Uplift, but the first major milestone of her return came at Ferndale Pride's opening ceremony, where she read a poem in honor of trans icon Marsha P. Johnson — a quieter, more intentional kind of performance than the genre-bending sets she's known for.

Motor City Pride is next, and it's a significant booking. Rodriguez, who made his Broadway debut as the youngest person ever cast as Angel in "Rent" and rose to national prominence as the culture guide on Bravo's Emmy-winning "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," arrives in Detroit fresh off what's shaping up to be a busy summer — his film "Stop! That! Train!," the new RuPaul action-comedy, opens in theaters June 12, the week after the festival. For Brooks to open for him on the Pride Stage is a statement about where her profile is headed.

When she's not performing, Brooks is a K-8 music teacher, a detail she's historically



Baddie Brooks. Courtesy photo

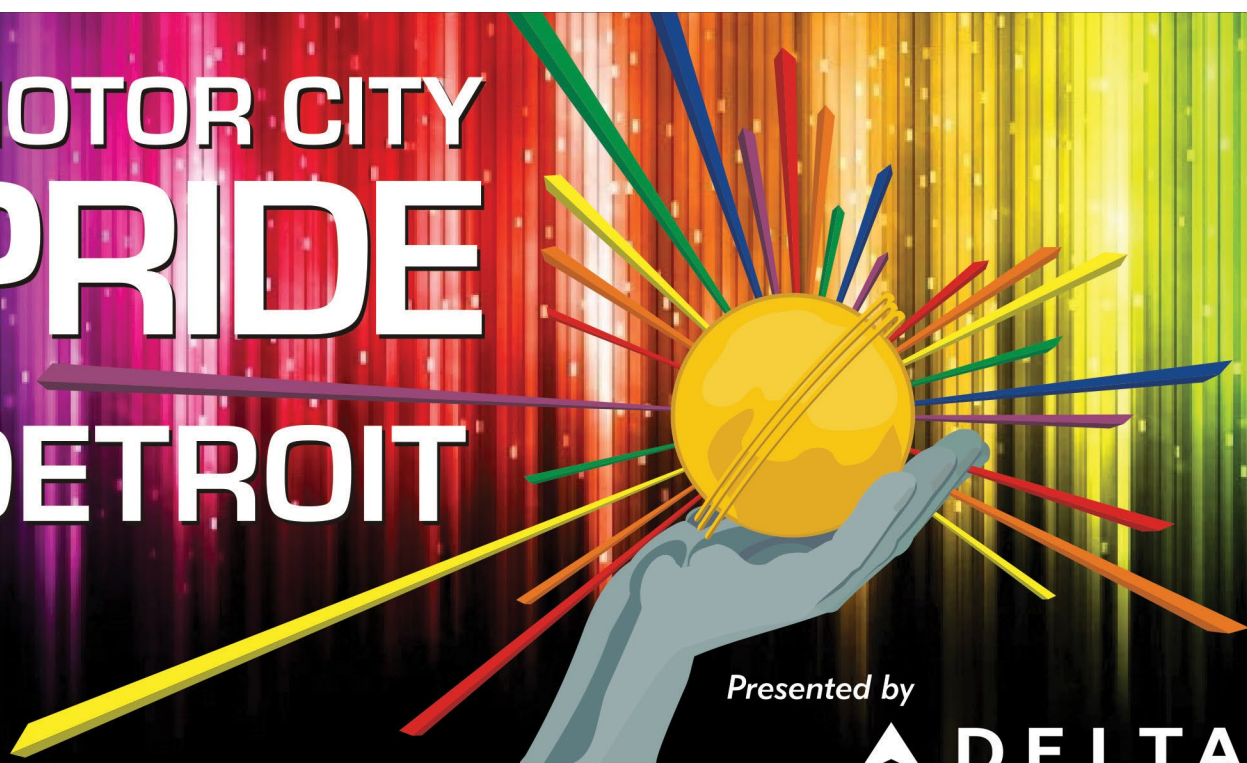
kept somewhat separate from her artist life — though her students have a way of closing that gap on their own. ("Are you Miss Beyoncé?" is apparently a recurring question at school.) She earned her degree at Eastern Michigan University as a classically trained musician specializing in trumpet and euphonium, and that formal foundation shows up in a catalog that's anything but stiff. Her debut album, "Reclamation," dropped in 2023 as a 16-track statement of purpose and earned her the Louis Armstrong Jazz Award. Now, with her sophomore effort taking shape, she's rolling out singles ahead of a planned fall release. Her most recent drop, "Dizzy," is already out, while "Release," the lead single and likely album title, is out now.

Beyond Hart Plaza, her summer calendar includes Twin Cities Pride in Minneapolis on June 28, Fort Wayne Pride in Indiana in late July and Lenawee Pride in September, with a potential grand marshal appearance at Long Island's Freeport Pride still being finalized.

She'll be ready. Just don't ask her to do the splits.



MOTOR CITY  
**PRIDE**  
DETROIT



*Presented by*



**FESTIVAL**  
and **PARADE**

**HART PLAZA**

**JUNE 6 & 7, 2026**

**UNSHAKEN**

ROOTED IN PRIDE. LEADING WITH LOVE.

— **MOTOR CITY PRIDE** —

**VISIT [MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG](https://motorcitypride.org) TO LEARN MORE**

**#MOTORCITYPRIDE**



# Pride Stage

Sponsored by



Saturday, June 6, 2026

Time      Act

*Hosted by Sabin*

1:00 PM    The KB  
2:00 PM    The Science Fair  
3:00 PM    Motor City Drag  
4:00 PM    Better Love  
5:00 PM    Baddie Brooks  
6:00 PM    Jai Rodriguez  
7:00 PM    Motor City Drag  
8:00 PM    Pole Starz DET

Sunday, June 7, 2026

*Hosted by Bruno Alcantara*

1:00 PM    PRISM  
2:00 PM    Sophie Grey.  
3:00 PM    RuPaul's Mhi'ya Iman Le'Paige,  
              RuPaul's Jessica Wild, RuPaul's Ciara Myst  
4:00 PM    Alise King  
5:00 PM    NOVUL  
6:00 PM    Tiny Jag

# Pyramid Stage

Saturday, June 6, 2026

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Act</u>       |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1:00 PM     | ItsPrincessCiara |
| 2:00 PM     | Tego Luv         |
| 3:00 PM     | Johnny Sun       |
| 4:00 PM     | Nakea J          |
| 5:00 PM     | Charlie B. Keyz  |
| 6:00 PM     | Micah Gabrieel   |
| 7:00 PM     | Sing Out Detroit |

Sunday, June 7, 2026

|         |                                         |
|---------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1:00 PM | Joey Nadon                              |
| 2:00 PM | Strut Honey Fashion Show                |
| 3:30 PM | DJ CIV                                  |
| 4:00 PM | Crystal Harding<br>Production Drag Show |

Schedules are subject to change. Check the website

2026 SPONSORS





# Riverfront Dance Stage

**Saturday, June 6, 2026**

| Time     | Act                      |
|----------|--------------------------|
| 12:00 PM | DJirl B2B with DJ Reezzy |
| 12:30 PM | Ashton Swinton           |
| 1:00 PM  | Brooke Steele            |
| 1:30 PM  | Stacey Hotwaxx Hale      |
| 2:00 PM  | LadyMonix B2B Rimarkable |

**Sunday, June 7, 2026**

|          |                     |
|----------|---------------------|
| 12:00 PM | WE1SMAN             |
| 12:15 PM | Jess B2B with Amino |
| 12:30 PM | Anti                |
| 12:45 PM | Tylr_               |



**SATURDAY**  
WELCOME  
GATES OPEN  
AT 1 P.M.

**FESTIVAL EVENTS 1 - 9 p.m.**

**Three Stages of Entertainment  
Featuring over 50 Acts!**

Over 140 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits  
& Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+  
people coming together for Equality!

- 1 - 5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games  
Sponsored by Kroger
- 8 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes  
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)
- 9 P.M. Festival Closes

**#MOTORCITYPRIDE** \$5 for everyone over 12 years of age  
VISIT [MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG](http://MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG) TO LEARN MORE



**SUNDAY**  
WELCOME  
GATES OPEN  
AT 12:30 P.M.

**FESTIVAL EVENTS 12:30 - 7 p.m.**

**Three Stages of Entertainment  
Featuring over 50 Acts!**

Over 140 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits  
& Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+  
people coming together for Equality!

- NOON Motor City Pride Parade  
Sponsored by Jeep
- 1-5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games  
Sponsored by Kroger
- 6 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes  
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 6pm)
- 7 P.M. Festival Closes

**#MOTORCITYPRIDE** \$5 for everyone over 12 years of age  
VISIT [MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG](http://MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG) TO LEARN MORE

# PARADE

Presented by



**Sunday, June 7 Starts at Noon**

[motorcitypride.org](http://motorcitypride.org)



**Starts at the corner of Fort and Griswald**

[www.motorcitypride.org](http://www.motorcitypride.org) for any last minute updates.

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**La-Z-Boy**

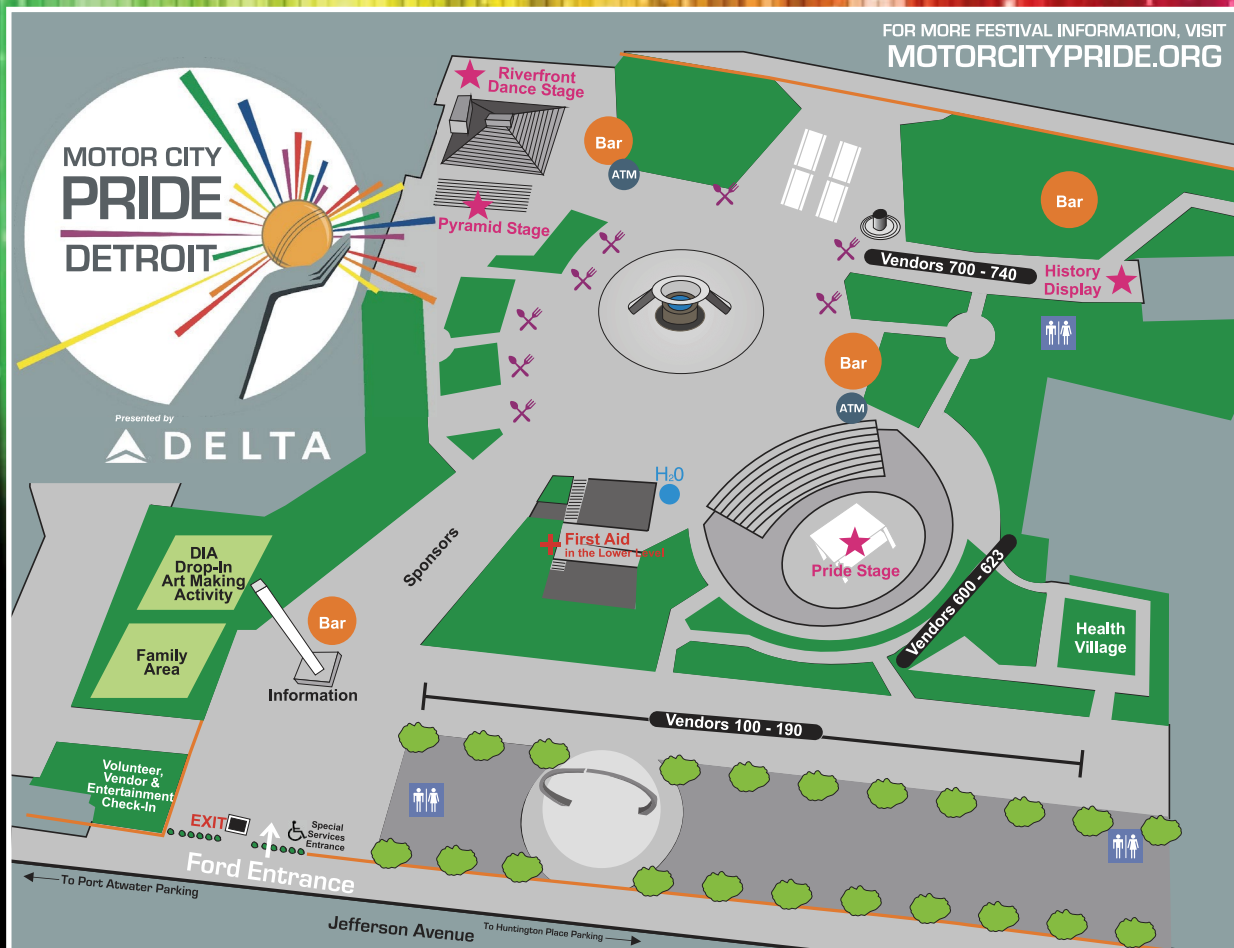
**MOLINA HEALTHCARE**

**PRIDESOURCE**

**NORDSTROM NORDSTROM Rack**

**TRULY**





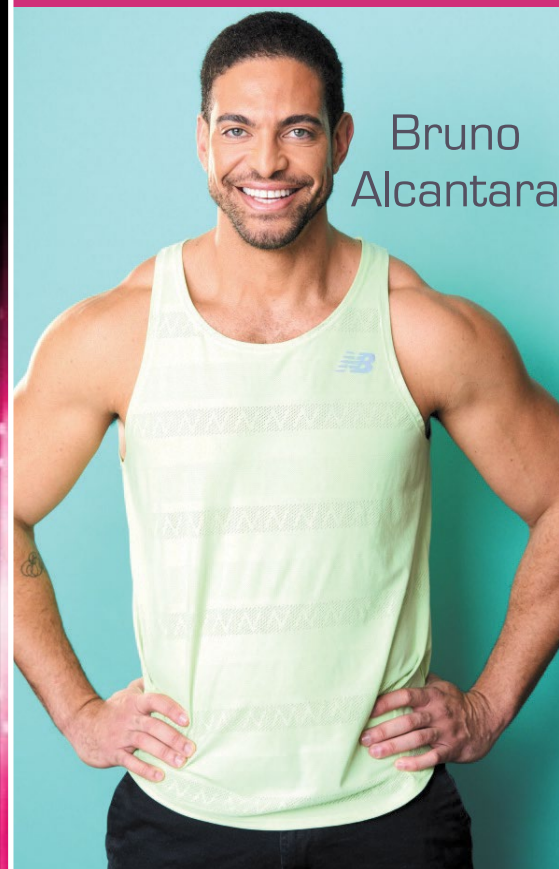
# Pride Stage

Saturday, June 6, 2026 • 6 p.m.



Jai Rodriguez

Sunday, June 7, 2026



Bruno Alcantara



## Family Activities

Sponsored by



**Saturday**

JUNE 7TH

1:00-5:00 P.M.

**Sunday**

JUNE 8TH

1:00-5:00 P.M.



Join other families as they participate in face painting, arts and crafts, plus much more!

## PARADE MAP SUNDAY AT NOON!





market and every single one of your exes! Deliberately family friendly... and free!

## Twin Cities PrideFest

**Shadowland Pavilion** (101 Broad St., Silver Beach County Park), 12-8 p.m.

[outcenter.org/twin-cities-pridefest](https://outcenter.org/twin-cities-pridefest)

Now strutting into its fabulous sixth year, Twin Cities PrideFest is the seasoned icon of the PrideFest On Tour crew — the glamparent with great stories, excellent taste and a beach bag full of sparkle. This joyful, sun-soaked bash at Silver Beach County Park brings the kind of energy where the lake is shimmering, the vibes are immaculate and everyone looks just a little bit better in flip-flops.

**Sunday, June 28**

## Berkley Pride Block Party

**Downtown Berkley**, 1-5 p.m.

[instagram.com/berkeleypride](https://instagram.com/berkeleypride)

Berkley Pride is back in Downtown Berkley (between Robina and Griffith, just south of 12 Mile), and it's the kind of free, family-friendly celebration that makes you remember how good it feels to be in community. What started as a grassroots gathering has grown into a vibrant, joy-filled event where neighbors, families and friends come together to celebrate love, authenticity and belonging. Plenty of free parking makes it that much easier to show up.

## Bluewater Pridefest (Port Huron)

**Downtown Port Huron** (McMorran Plaza), 1-7 p.m.

[bluewaterallies.com/team-1](https://bluewaterallies.com/team-1)

Bluewater Pridefest takes over downtown Port Huron for this family-friendly event that will include a special kids' zone (rumors of a cute clown abound), entertainment, amazing food and big queer smiles!

## Buchanan Pride

**The Common** (122 Days Ave., Buchanan), 1-8 p.m.

[buchananpride.com](https://buchananpride.com)

Buchanan Pride on The Common has a little something for everyone and a full day of joy starting with a vibrant vendor market!

## DeWitt Pride in the Park

**Riverside Park** (405 S. Bridge St., DeWitt), noon-3 p.m.

[midewittpride.org](https://midewittpride.org)

The third annual DeWitt Pride in the Park promises more of the same family-friendly fun that brought the community together the past few years, including games, activities, snacks and more.

## South Haven Pride

**Stanley Johnston Park** (202 Dyckman Ave.,

South Haven), June 27, noon-10 p.m. June 28, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

[facebook.com/southhavenmichiganpride](https://facebook.com/southhavenmichiganpride)

South Haven is a two-day love letter to community, connection and showing up exactly as you are. Hosted by South Haven LGBTQ+ Advocacy, Saturday is the big celebration (noon-10 p.m.), with a picnic-in-the-park vibe, live entertainment all day, kid games, crafts, carnival-style fun, a lively vendor market and a food fair that absolutely understands your snack priorities. This year, they added a Sunday portion, with a laid-back vendor fair. And do not under any circumstances miss the Free Mom Hugs booth!

## JULY

**Saturday, July 11**

## South Lyon Pride

**McHattie Park** (300 Dorothy St.), noon-4 p.m.

[facebook.com/SouthLyonPride](https://facebook.com/SouthLyonPride)

The sixth annual South Lyon Pride is once again gracing McHattie Park with a glitter-infused presence. Stay tuned for more info on food trucks, drag king story time, drag performances and a special rainbow run!

**Friday, July 17**

## Battle Creek Pride (through July 18)

**Parade:** Michigan Ave. at Washington St., July 17, 7 p.m.

**Festival:** Leila Arboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave., Battle Creek), July 18, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

[battlecreekpride.org](https://battlecreekpride.org)

Battle Creek Pride festivities kick off Friday with an evening parade — promptly at 7 p.m., so save your emotional ex-texts for later and snag a good view of that softball league float you've been waiting for all year. If you want to march in the parade (as an individual human, a float or a gaggle of dancing queens), register in advance. The parade registration instructions make an all-caps point that equestrian units must provide an accompanying cleanup crew, which sounds fair and also sounds like a good story.

**Saturday, July 18**

## Flint Pride

**Flat Lot** (428 S. Saginaw St., Flint), 2-8 p.m.

[facebook.com/FLINTGAYPRIDE](https://facebook.com/FLINTGAYPRIDE)

Sure, Riverbank Park is still undergoing renovation, but Flint Pride isn't letting a little construction impair the celebration. After receiving 80 applications for entertainment, the organizers are hunkered down, watching video clips and sorting through drag names, and they'll announce performers one by one starting in June until they reach the surprise

See **Pride Calendar**, page 30



PRISM performs at Pistons Pride Night 2025. Photo: Detroit Pistons

# Detroit's Pride Season Goes Beyond the Festival

From PRISM's Orchestra Hall debut and back-to-back anniversary concerts, Metro Detroit's June calendar has serious range

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Looking to step outside the festival circuit this Pride season? Metro Detroit's LGBTQ+ choral community is offering two milestone anniversary concerts that make a strong case for celebrating with song.

PRISM Chorus brings its 10th anniversary to Orchestra Hall on June 27, joining the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for "Disney PRIDE in Concert." The program features new arrangements of beloved classics from "The Little Mermaid" to "Coco," paired with curated video clips weaving together themes of love, identity and belonging.

Out Loud Chorus is marking its own milestone with considerably more dramatic flair. The Washtenaw County-based all-inclusive queer chorus turns 30 this year and is celebrating with "The Big 3-Oh-No: OLC Laments Turning 30," a two-night concert June 12 and 13 at the Lincoln Consolidated Schools Performing Arts Auditorium in Ypsilanti. Check [olonline.org](https://olonline.org) for tickets and accessibility information.

There's plenty more happening beyond the festival grounds this month:

## "Glitter and Concrete" — An Evening of Drag History

**Michigan Theater** (603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor), June 4, 7 p.m. [marquee-arts.org](https://marquee-arts.org)

Author and historian Elyssa Maxx Goodman and drag artist Jupiter bring "Glitter and Concrete: A Cultural History of Drag in New York City" to life with an evening of original drag performances by local artists, each inspired by a historical figure from the book. A Q&A with Goodman, Jupiter and the performers

follows, digging into drag's cultural legacy and the art of the transformation.

## Pride Night at the West Michigan Whitecaps

**LMCU Ballpark** (4500 West River Drive, Comstock Park), June 4, 6:35 p.m. [milb.com/west-michigan](https://milb.com/west-michigan)

The Detroit Tigers' High-A affiliate kicks off Pride Month on the diamond, bringing the Grand Rapids-area LGBTQ+ community out to the ballpark for a night of minor league baseball and major Pride energy.

## "We Are Timeless" 40th Anniversary Concert — Sistrum Chorus

**DeWitt High School**, DeWitt, June 5, 7 p.m. [facebook.com/SistrumChorus](https://facebook.com/SistrumChorus)

The Lansing-based women's chorus marks 40 years with a retrospective that reunites three directors — founding director Rachel Alexander, returning director Dr. Meredith Bowen and current director Meghan Eldred-Woolsey in her final performance with the group. Two intermissions, complimentary refreshments and a silent auction make this less a concert and more of a proper send-off.

## Pride Film Series

**Michigan Theater / State Theatre** (603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor), June 5-19 [marquee-arts.org](https://marquee-arts.org)

Six hand-picked queer cinema classics screen throughout June, spanning decades and continents — "Bound" (June 5), "The Handmaiden" (June 11), "Cruising" (June 12), "Mulholland Drive" (June 18)

See **Alt Pride**, page 41



# Hey Voter!



Start the voting process now for the August 4 Primary Election.

- ➡ **Now through July 20:** you can register to vote online or by mail. Complete or download an application at [mi.gov/vote](https://mi.gov/vote).
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- ➡ **It only takes two minutes. Register today!**



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- ➡ **Check your registration or register today at [mi.gov/vote](https://mi.gov/vote).**

Your community is depending on you to vote. Learn more about your voting options at:

**MichiganVoting.org**

## ◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 29

headliner!

### Ypsi Pride (Ypsilanti)

**East Cross Street** (Depot Town), 2-10 p.m.

[facebook.com/YpsiPride](https://facebook.com/YpsiPride)

This year's theme is "Pride Above and Beyond." Although applications for vendors and entertainment are now closed, keep your eyes on the organization's socials for announcements of all the performers and more coming soon!

### Thursday, July 23

#### Hotter Than July (Detroit)

**Detroit** (multiple venues and dates)

[hotterthanjuly.org](https://hotterthanjuly.org)

2026 marks the 31st anniversary of Hotter Than July, Michigan's longest-running Black LGBTQ+ Pride event. The week-long celebration includes performance and visual art, films, connection and so much community. You can apply to have your art, film or live performance included in the 31st annual event and peruse photos from the 30th event on the Hotter Than July website.

### Saturday, July 25

#### Royal Oak Pride

**Downtown Royal Oak**, 1-11 p.m.

[prideroyaloak.com](https://prideroyaloak.com)

The folks at Royal Oak Pride started their festival countdown at 100 days out, so they're definitely not playing with their love of hardcore logistics. Entertainment will be announced soon. In the meantime, plan to bring the whole family (an extensive kids' zone is promised) — and if you're the literary type, Sidetrack Bookshop is once again bringing back its authors panel.

## AUGUST

### Saturday, August 1

#### Ann Arbor Pride

**Downtown Ann Arbor**

[annarborpride.com](https://annarborpride.com)

### Saturday, August 8

#### Macomb County Pride Festival

**Main Street between Macomb Place and Market Street**, Mount Clemens, noon-6 p.m.

[macombcountypride.com](https://macombcountypride.com)

Last year's Macomb County Pride Festival was attended by almost 6,000 happy folks. This year, the festival returns with entertainment, resources and visits from

See **Pride Calendar**, page 32



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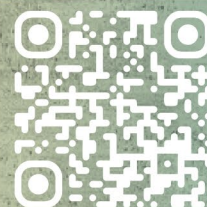
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## ◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 30

elected officials, some looking more uncomfortable than others. Plus, look for a family-friendly Youth Zone and additional youth-focused entertainment, including Drag Queen Story Time hosted by the Mount Clemens Public Library and a Children's Activity Area.

### Saturday, August 22

#### Transgender Pride in the Park

**Martin Road Park** (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale), noon-6 p.m.

[transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride](http://transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride)

This is Transgender Michigan's 26th annual event, which features a BYO picnic (food vendors are available), entertainment, speakers and excellent company. Bring friends or make new ones!

### Saturday, August 29

#### Jackson Pride

**Horace Blackman Park** (W. Michigan Ave. and S. Jackson St.), 2-8 p.m.

[mijacksonpride.org/events](http://mijacksonpride.org/events)

Jackson Pride Fest is bringing the joy to downtown with a full afternoon of music, food and community — running until 8 p.m., with something fun happening every hour.

Expect live performances, food trucks, local vendors, a family-friendly kids zone and a Walk of Pride where you can show up and show out. There are even cooling stations to keep you refreshed while you soak up all the love. And if you're not ready for the night to end, the party keeps going at the rooftop after party at Jackson School of the Arts from 9 p.m. to midnight, with a DJ, drinks and snacks to keep the good vibes going.

## SEPTEMBER

### Saturday, September 19

#### Straits Pride (Mackinac Island)

**Mackinac Island**

[straitspride.org](http://straitspride.org)

If there's a better theme than "anchored in love" for an island Pride event, we can't imagine what it would be.

### Saturday, September 25

#### Lenawee Pride (Adrian)

**Downtown Adrian**, 3-8 p.m.

[campsite.bio/lenaweepride](http://campsite.bio/lenaweepride)

Lenawee Pride is back for its fabulous seventh year. Look out for DJs, drag, queer performances, local vendors, food trucks, community orgs and, of course, a Shop & Strut with allied businesses.



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# Still Seen as ‘Not Queer Enough’

A new survey examines the quiet exhaustion of bisexual and pansexual erasure in Michigan

BY BROOKE LINDLEY

As a Ph.D. student studying how identity and stigma shape well-being, I keep coming back to a particular kind of stress — the kind that builds not from one dramatic moment, but from being misread often enough that it starts to feel like that’s just the way things are.

My research put a face to something State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky already knew from lived experience.

“My sexual identity is very fluid,” Pohutsky told me recently. “While I have no problem identifying as bisexual, I generally self-identify as queer because it is less

associated with a stringent gender binary. I find people interesting, irrespective of their gender identity.”

For her, the label is less about tidy categories and more about breathing room, language that doesn’t demand she choose a lane to be believed. Still, belief has been the hardest thing to come by.

“When I ended a relationship with a woman and later entered a relationship with a man, many of my queer friends cut ties because they no longer considered me part of the community,” she said. “Additionally, many straight friends began labeling me as straight as though my relationship at any given moment fundamentally changed my sexual orientation.”

That experience has a name: double erasure. It happens when bisexual and pansexual people are dismissed in straight spaces and questioned in queer ones, when the message, however it’s delivered, is that your identity only counts when it makes sense to someone else.

For Pohutsky, the consequences weren’t limited to hurt feelings.

“Because both queer and straight communities did not understand me, it left me with few people to turn to,” she said. “It was hurtful and isolating, albeit unfortunately common.”

In February 2026, I surveyed 258 Michiganders about how erasure shows up in their lives. Most respondents identified

as bisexual (69.8%) or pansexual (16.7%), with others using labels like multisexual, omnisexual and ambisexual. Respondents came from across the state, including Northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, West Michigan, Mid-Michigan and Southeast Michigan, and most said they were out in most areas of life, while others described being out only in certain spaces or not at all.

Not everyone can safely put their name on a quote about identity, family or work. But even without names attached, the pattern was striking: people described being erased so often it started to feel like background noise.

One respondent described the re-





Laurie Pohutsky speaking at an event on the Capitol steps in Lansing. Courtesy photo

labeling that comes with relationship changes, noting that entering a different-gender relationship led people to treat them as “basically straight now.” Another said their identity had been dismissed as “confusion or a phase.” The cruelty runs deeper than the judgment itself. It implies that belonging is conditional, that someone else gets to decide whether you meet the standard.

There’s a term for the pressure that builds when someone spends their days being questioned or re-labeled: minority stress. For bi and pan people, it often works through a specific and familiar ritual, where other people “solve” their identity by looking at their current partner. In practice, it can look like scanning a room before speaking, rehearsing how to answer a question and deciding whether correcting someone is worth the energy.

That fatigue showed up clearly in my survey. “That pressure has caused anxiety and constant self-monitoring,” one respondent said. “I’m always calculating

“Because both queer and straight communities did not understand me, it left me with few people to turn to. It was hurtful and isolating, albeit unfortunately common.”

— State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky

what’s safe to say and to whom, which takes a real toll over time.” Another described the exhaustion of being asked to justify themselves: “The constant need to explain or defend my identity has been draining.”

Minority stress doesn’t require a single catastrophic event to accumulate. Small encounters that repeat often enough start to feel inevitable, and they teach people to

See **Double Erasure**, page 44



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# After Everything, Melissa Etheridge Is Still Rising



Melissa Etheridge. Courtesy photo

On her first album in seven years, the lesbian rock legend finds clarity after loss — and has a powerful message for her community

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

It doesn't take long for Melissa Etheridge to feel like an old friend. Seconds into our latest conversation, she's already asking what I think of her new album, "Rise" — her first in seven years — and within moments we're deep into the kind of conversation that makes you forget you're supposed to be conducting an interview. That's always been our history.

Seven years is a long time. Long enough to grieve, to rebuild, to sit with loss until it becomes something you can sing about. For Etheridge, "Rise" is that album — the one that had to wait until she had the words. And the words, it turns out, arrived with a kind of hard-won clarity: about the radical power of controlling your own mind and what it means to keep living after the unthinkable.

We've talked at so many different moments in her life — most recently in 2025, when the Southern California wildfires forced her from her home. In 2023, she spoke to me about the death of her son, Beckett Cypher, who died from opioid addiction in 2020 at age 21. Since then, the Melissa Etheridge making "Rise" has been through more of the kind of things that either break you or reshape you. She sounds, unmistakably, like the latter.

We spoke ahead of Pride Month — when the stakes for our community feel as high as they've felt in years — and I wanted to know what she's carrying into it. What she'd say to people who are tired or scared. What it felt like to finally get that Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nomination. And what, after all this time, she wants us to take from this album.

Her answer, like the record itself, keeps coming back to the same thing: We're going to fall to the earth sometimes. But our natural state is rising.

## What feels most different about the Melissa Etheridge who made "Rise"?

Let me say that the song "Rise" was very much inspired by the fires, because I was feeling for my city and, good God, the Palisades. It was just really breaking my heart. But I knew that we would rise from the ashes. And God, just the last few years have just been really rough on us.



**And then, of course, what you've gone through on your own.**

Yes, some great loss, of course, and people can absolutely understand that. Because of everything I've been through — cancer and [being] gay and seeing how things play out — I don't get depressed. I know the basic human nature is joy. And really, we are meant to be happy. Things happen. But I've lived long enough now to really understand that.

I felt very inspired to speak and sing this message: You're going to fall to the earth, you're going to taste the dirt, but then you're going to rise. And why is it so easy to make it so hard? Sometimes it's so hard to understand that we are supposed to be happy.

We're not supposed to feel guilty because someone else is not happy. We are in charge of our own happiness. When I realized that I don't need someone else to change to make me happy, that was a big one. And I was trying to really put that in the song when I said, "There's a hope I dare not speak/frustrating, most people find," because we want them to change so that we'll feel safe. But that's not how it works. You don't need to change to set me free because I'm always free to change my mind. I can think differently of MAGA, I can think differently of people who are afraid themselves. It's up to us how we feel about it. We are in control of our response. And I think once I got that, my life really became easier and more joyful.

**I love when I get on a call with you and we immediately get this deep. That really is our history.**

That's what we do.

**So then, how do these learned perspectives play into the new music?**

Over the years, I have truly come to understand the connectivity of all of us, of the human race. And to see that we all just want to be loved. We all want to feel safe. We all want our family, our immediate loves to feel safe, all of us. And it looks different to everyone. And I wanted to write an album

that was accessible. I had done a lot of writing in the last 15 years that was me going, "Oh, I want to do whatever I want. I want to express myself and try this and try that," because I just got off the record label.

When I sat down with this a couple years ago, I sat down to say, "OK, I really want to think this through. I don't want to just write some songs and put them out. I want to craft songs this time, songs that people want to not just listen to, but that affect them and that they can relate to — simple but powerful." So there was a lot of editing. It was a lot of finding the shortest, most powerful way to

*"All of us are so much more powerful than we know. Coming out and being out and being who you are is the best thing you can do for yourself and for your community."*

express this emotion.

**"Call You" feels like, to me, the emotional center of the record, this idea of reaching for someone who is no longer there. How did writing that song change what the rest of the album could be?**

It was the first song I wrote. I needed to create a song where I could sing over and over, "I will not stop living, even though I can't call you anymore." That's for me. That's for me to go, "Yes, I feel this. I've got your picture and I'm holding it here. That physical part of you is over, but I still feel connected. I'm connected to you when I garden and I put my fingers in the dirt. I'm connected when

See **Melissa Etheridge**, page 46

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out what the fucking problem was.

**It takes a long time to unpack those layers if you grew up in the church. I went through the same thing.**

Yeah, and it's really isolating as a member of the queer community to feel like you want community and connection, and a connection to a higher purpose and higher self, but be ostracized from the place that creates that community. I think that's never sat with me well.

**I'm thinking about that kid right now — and I'm also thinking about you on stage during The Freedom Tour. What does it feel like when you connect those two people?**

Well, I think I'm really proud of myself, because when I was 14 or 15 years old, I remember sitting outside in a parking lot listening to a demo I had made that was like some song called "Pink Champagne," or something like that, which I'd never had champagne. And I'm sitting outside in my shitty beat up car and being like, "If I ever make it, I'm going to make a place for people like me and you," to my one queer friend. And I feel really proud that with the help of amazing people and incredible loyal animals, we've created that with each other and for each other, and I feel so grateful to my fans for showing up and allowing me to do what I do. And I hope that they really celebrate themselves and enjoy the space because everything I do is to create a safe space for people to live authentically and freely.

**When that Pride flag appears on the screen behind you during this tour, what does that feel like for you?**

I know how much it can change your life if one person can just radically love you. I want every single person there to know that exactly as they are, I radically love them and the space that I create is for them and they belong. And it's so important to me.



Kesha during The Freedom Tour. Photo: Emma McIntyre / Getty Images Entertainment

**Does the crowd get louder when that flag gets flown?**

Always. It's for us. Because I was born in America and I belong here and so do you, and so does every person in that crowd, and I will create a safe space. Even if elsewhere doesn't feel so safe, I will try to create that safe space forever.

**How does it feel to be creating this safe space inside a venue when you know what's happening to the queer and trans community outside of it?**

It's never fully made sense to me the levels of hatred and vitriol that come towards the queer community. I come from really a place of not understanding where that hate comes from, so I just want to create light, I want to create love and I want to create space for that. I'm traveling around the world, not only this country, the whole world, and it pains me. There is so much heartbreak, like a heartache when I see people treating one another with hatred, and that just is across the board. So I try to create these little bubbles of light and love.

And hopefully you'll feel that when you come to the show.

**When did you first realize queer people were seeing themselves in your work?**

Right when I first put music out. I moved out to California and was like, "Well, I don't know where I belong." And then I was in Nashville and I found the punk scene and I found the one gay bar and I was like, "OK." I was in the marching band. I was on the softball team. I was like, "OK, I kind of belong in these places." But then I came out to California and it was when I went to the Silver Platter, which was this kind of punk-rock drag bar, and I was like, "Oh shit, these are my people. These are *my* people."

I was just so inspired by the scene. It was both so playful and light and fun and joyful and celebratory, but it was also cool as fuck. And you could tell that that joy was an act of resistance. It wasn't just joy and like life had come easy. This was hard-fought joy by these performers and these people in this bar, and I really related to that very deeply and cellularly.

**You're making me think of this arc between two albums. "Rainbow" to me felt like an album about survival and rebuilding yourself and ".(Period)" feels freer and more sexually uninhibited. Do you see this new era as the person that "Rainbow" was fighting to become?**

Oh, I love that. Yeah. Listen, all of my music is just me processing my life in real time. So sometimes I listen back to a song and it just feels like I'm listening to a therapy note. [Laughs.] I think "Rainbow" was me definitely processing what was going on at the time, but also it was a little bit of a love letter to my future self. So I love that you put it like that. It was definitely kind of a promise to a girl who was like, one day I will be happy and free and here we are. So I think you're right.

**Yeah, I'm not sure you'd be as sexually liberated on this album if you didn't make "Rainbow."**

Oh my god, I love that, because I remember making an album cover for "Rainbow." It's just a funny story: I was running around



*“I was born in America and I belong here and so do you, and so does every person in that crowd, and I will create a safe space.”*

on the beach in this sparkly jumpsuit and my mom was there and she was taking pictures on her phone. On the way home she showed me and was like, “Wow, you just were really running around naked.” And I was like, “What are you talking about?” She showed me a picture and it was like the emperor’s new clothes. I definitely thought I had clothes on. Turns out totally see-through, and that was what ended up being the cover of “Rainbow.” So maybe it was a little premonition of my sexual liberation.

**And now we’ve got the “Origami!” video. Let’s talk about how naked and queer that video is.**

Totally. I love that video. I hope you like it too. It’s so campy.

**Why was it important for you to put that kind of sexual freedom on screen right now?**

I think that loving oneself and loving one’s body, and to the hell with everything else, is such an act of resistance in times where

it feels like the world’s trying to really hijack our nervous system and put us in a state of fear and self-hatred. It’s such an act of resistance to be full of love, joy and horniness. I absolutely love being horny for life. It’s healthy. I really wanted to make a video that felt like a Jodorowsky-style sex dream, but also be true to where I’m at. I wrote this song when I was kind of going through my sexual liberation phase about a year ago. And then this year I’ve decided to be mostly celibate.

**You’re busy.**

I’m too busy. [Laughs.]

**You’re on a world tour. You don’t have to say it. I’ll say it for you.**

[Laughs.] But so I wanted the video to really reflect both periods of my life authentically, because I think great art is the truth. So it goes from me being in Italy in a confessional, which is true. When I was in Italy, that was ... I’m horny for Italy, what can I say? But then the actual song and the video are kind of immortalizing this

fantasy, very psychedelic, psycho-magic sex dream.

**While we’re on the topic of sex: I saw a photo of you from this tour and you’re on top of a muscly guy in a harness on a chair. It looks very BDSM to me. And you’re wielding a knife. What’s going on there, Kesha?**

[Laughs.] Wouldn’t you like to know?

**I’d love to know.**

Well, we’re just having fun. The show is actually the story of my life told through my life’s work, which is my music. So I take people to the period of my life that was the sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll section. And that is a portion of the song where I’m actually kind of trying to represent the destruction of self when you lose touch with the groundedness, and in this moment I’m killing off parts of myself. It just so happens to be in the form of a hot, muscly man in BDSM gear. [Laughs.]



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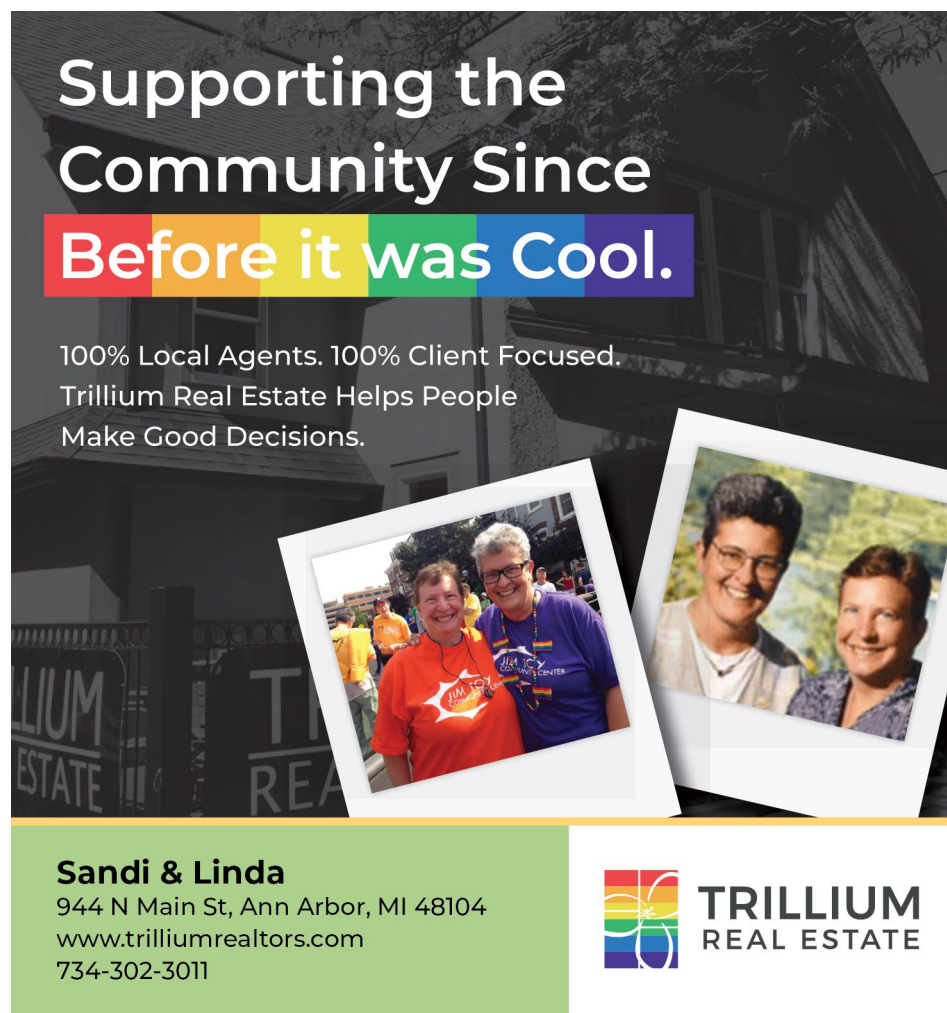
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## ACLU

Continued from page 11

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## Michigan Legislature

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- In 2022, a pro-civil rights majority was elected to both the Michigan House and Senate for the first time in 40 years. That led to passing an LGBTQ-inclusive civil rights law (after 46 years of trying), a series of laws that recognized LGBTQ+ families, and a prohibition on conversion therapy by licensed therapists.
- After the 2024 election, an anti-LGBTQ rights majority regained control of the House. That has resulted in the introduction of more than a dozen anti-trans pieces of legislation, in addition to a resolution calling on the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the 2015 marriage equality decision. Moreover, that same majority was able to block pro-LGBTQ legislation from moving forward.

Potential harm from the state House has been kept in check the past few years because people supportive of LGBTQ+ rights retained control of the state Senate. But everything will be up for grabs in November, with all 110 seats in the Michigan House of Representatives and all 38 seats in the Michigan Senate up for election.

Who controls our state Legislature will determine whether we can continue expanding LGBTQ+ rights in Michigan or are forced to fight defensive actions against hostile legislation that threaten to take away hard-earned successes.

## Michigan Supreme Court

Who sits on the Michigan Supreme Court can have an immense impact on our community, with the court's decisions shaping our civil rights and liberties, including LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive rights, disability rights, privacy rights and more. Since 2021, a number of rulings favorable to the LGBTQ+ community have been handed down. As a result:

- LGBTQ+ people are guaranteed protection under Michigan civil rights laws that prohibit sex discrimination.
- Crimes of violence directed against transgender people are now covered under Michigan's hate crime laws.
- Same-sex partners can be recognized as parents to their children, even if they are not biologically related.

Two of the seven Michigan Supreme Court seats will be up for election this year. We need to make sure the people who win will continue upholding, and expanding, our civil rights and protections.

## U.S. Senate and House of Representatives

We are, unfortunately, seeing firsthand what happens when politicians hostile to the LGBTQ+ community control the federal levers of power. Come Election Day, we will be selecting a new U.S. senator. In addition, every House seat, both in Michigan and throughout the country, is up for election — presenting an opportunity to change the majority in both houses of Congress. With our vote, we can take control from people with disdain for LGBTQ+ rights and put it in the hands of people who will fight on our behalf.

With an anti-civil rights majority in both the U.S. House and Senate, it has been impossible to move any pro-LGBTQ legislation. That includes:

The Equality Act, groundbreaking legislation that would provide explicit protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Showing Up

With so much at stake, members of the LGBTQ+ community cannot afford to sit on the sidelines during this election. Not voting has consequences. In the 2024 presidential election, for example, close to 90 million eligible voters did not cast a ballot. Those nonvoters outnumbered the votes for any single candidate. The outcome of that election could easily have been different had more people engaged in the democratic process.

The lesson drawn from that cannot be ignored. If the rights of LGBTQ+ people are going to be protected, it is up to the members of our community to help lead the way by electing people who reflect the values of our community.

If we want to not only protect our civil rights gains but continue gaining protection, it is vital that each of us join the chorus to amplify our collective voice by voting.



and “Moonlight” (June 19). The undisputed highlight is the June 14 special musical event screening of “Xanadu,” complete with drag performances, a costume contest and strongly encouraged singing and dancing. Break out the roller skates. Check the website for showtimes and locations.

**Pride Art Show**

**Anton Art Center** (125 Macomb Place, Mount Clemens), June 6-Aug. 1; Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. [theartcenter.org](http://theartcenter.org)

Forty-five works by 28 LGBTQ+ artists fill the Anton Art Center’s second-floor gallery all summer, with cash prizes up for grabs and free admission for everyone. Presented by PFLAG of Clinton Township and juried by Phil Gilchrist, it’s the center’s first national juried Pride exhibition — and a genuinely good excuse to spend a weekday afternoon in Mount Clemens. Opening reception and awards announcement June 6, 1-3 p.m.

**PRISM Chorus Fairy Tale Tour**

Various Metro Detroit venues, June 7-13  
[prism-chorus.org](http://prism-chorus.org)

Before the big Orchestra Hall finale, PRISM takes its 10th anniversary celebration on the road with free community appearances at Motor City Pride at Hart Plaza (June 7), Royal Oak Family Pride at the Farmers Market

(June 10) and Ruth Ellis Center’s CAT Fight Against the Crown at St. Andrews Hall (June 13). Consider it a very worthy warm-up act.

**Ypsi Library Queer Crafting Group**

**Ypsilanti District Library** (229 W. Michigan Ave.), second Monday monthly, 6-8 p.m. — including June 9. [ypsilibrary.events.mylibrary.digital](http://ypsilibrary.events.mylibrary.digital)

The Ypsilanti District Library’s free monthly drop-in gives LGBTQ+ adults a shared creative space to work on whatever they’re making — fiber arts, painting, drawing, paper crafts, digital projects or just a good excuse to get out of the house and be around people. Bring your current project or just show up.

**Pride Night at the Lansing Lugnuts**

**Jackson Field** (505 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing), June 9, 7:05 p.m. [mlb.com/lansing](http://mlb.com/lansing)

The Lugnuts welcome local LGBTQ+ advocacy groups to Jackson Field for an annual Pride Night focused on making the ballpark a space where everyone feels at home. Bonus: It’s also a Copa de la Diversión game, so the team suits up as the Lansing Locos — turquoise, marigold and fully chaotic.

**“Swing Into Summer Pride” at**

**Cranbrook on the Green**

**Cranbrook Art Museum** (39221 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills), June 11, 4-8 p.m. [cranbrookartmuseum.org](http://cranbrookartmuseum.org)

One of Michigan’s most stunning cultural campuses gets a Pride upgrade for the evening, as Cranbrook and Stonewall Sports team up for a night on the museum’s mini-golf course — discounted tickets, free museum admission, a DJ and a cash bar included. World-class architecture and a putting green. Honestly, what more do you need?

**“Heaven in Detroit” Summer of Heaven Series**

**Senate Theater** (6424 Michigan Ave., Detroit), through June 27  
[detroitssoundconservancy.org](http://detroitssoundconservancy.org)

Club Heaven wasn’t just a bar — it was a sanctuary, dance floor and safe haven for generations of Black LGBTQ+ Detroiters, and this summer film series honors that legacy in full. The ongoing Electric Roots: Art & Film Festival runs through June 30, building toward the full “Heaven in Detroit” premiere on June 19 (6-10 p.m.) — an evening of screening, panel discussion, Club Heaven exhibit, vogue performance and dance party that doubles as a love letter to Detroit’s techno roots.

**“Born This Way” Pride Night at The Creature Conservancy**

**The Creature Conservancy** (4950 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor), June 13, 7-9 p.m. — 21+ [thecreatureconservancy.org](http://thecreatureconservancy.org)

The Ann Arbor nonprofit animal sanctuary — home to cougars, alligators, warhogs and plenty of other creatures who didn’t ask to be this fabulous — hosts its second annual Pride celebration, spotlighting LGBTQ+ artists and performers alongside a showcase of the animal kingdom’s own gloriously queer diversity.

**Detroit Queer Sketch Series**

**Detroit GT Studio** (2301 Wolcott, Ferndale), first Monday and third Thursday monthly, 6:30-9:30 p.m. [jamesstaycation.com/sketch](http://jamesstaycation.com/sketch)

A welcoming, pay-what-you-can life drawing series for queer and allied artists of all skill levels, hosted by artists James Staycation and Chris Gorski. Expect diverse models, lo-fi music, snack breaks and zero judgment — art supplies are provided, BYOB is encouraged and registration is required.

**Detroit Tigers Pride Night**

**Comerica Park** (2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit), June 23, 6:40 p.m. [mlb.com/tigers](http://mlb.com/tigers)

The Tigers welcome the New York Yankees to Comerica Park for Pride Night, with special ticket packages available and PRISM Chorus on hand to sing the national anthem — a neat preview of the chorus’s big Orchestra Hall moment just four days later.

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## North Star

Continued from page 18

out as nonbinary.

He was completely supportive but curious, and together we surveyed memories of my childhood in new light: holding hands as we tossed out candy at a Boy Scout parade, hula dancing in music class when every other kid was too cool — I'd never been boyish. And I remembered child me sitting in my closet (a bit on the nose!) and musing that if I could have chosen my gender, I'd have been born a girl.

*“If I were ever to achieve my ideal self, I'd have to transition again in an instant, because the world would change, and the world would change her, and she'd have to change for the world.”*

That Aster, a Tumblr fanatic who never would have hidden the covers of her YA romance novels or stopped playing with stuffed animals, never got to be. But with a move out of state impending, I realized no one in Pittsburgh would know me. I could be anyone.

But who to be? Author Franz Kafka said, “I was ashamed of myself when I realized life was a costume party and I attended with my real face.” The best way to feel natural in my skin, I decided, was to be natural, regardless of expectations others drew from my Adam's (Eve's?) apple or the bulge in my pants. I'd try to be a “conscientious objector” to gender norms.

But even as I hate that our society divides things by gender, I've drawn mainly from one pool. I get euphoria from skirts, from makeup, from the tickle of my long hair on my neck because it's what feels opposite the

masculinity I'd been pushed toward. And so, when a job application asks for my sex, I'll put “male” (though I'm not even sure of that; I've never had a karyotype taken, and I produce negligible testosterone now). But for “gender,” I will select “female,” because people still think in either/or.

And yet, every new acquaintance calls me “he” or “sir” without asking my pronouns. I can be wearing a skirt and blouse and carrying a purse, to no effect. In the mirror, a prominent brow and five-o'clock shadow make me, too, think of a man. But now and then, I'll catch my reflection and see a woman. By imperceptible increments, I am changing. I'm growing breasts. My face is softening. I'm smiling more.

But I do hear my voice, deep and resonant in my chest. While HRT allows me a shrill head voice when I'm excited, my tires haven't caught on training exercises — I think it's because I would be conscious of the change. My transition thus far has been a series of headlong leaps: Take a tablet of estrogen or put on the anesthesia mask, and the alteration progresses without my direction. But modulating my voice's resonance and pitch would require decision after decision — every time I speak, a “Yes, this is what I want to be.” And I don't know who that is or how to be OK with every self I become between me and her.

A transition is a movement from one place to another — every thought I have, every feeling, every synaptic exchange and flicker of an electron, adds to the history and reconfigures the present of this “me.” I can advance in the general direction of an ideal Aster, but if I keep my eyes on her, my ankle might twist from a dip in the ground. If I watch my feet, I could lose my bearing. And all the while, the wind and world and other pedestrians will buffet and jostle me, because there are billions of us here.

And so, transitioning, for me, is really an interminable series of transitions. If I were ever to achieve my ideal self, I'd have to transition again in an instant, because the world would change, and the world would change her, and she'd have to change for the world. But that's how we make ourselves: in conversation with the cosmos, a back and forth. Action and reaction.

And so, transition is, at least for me, a voyage of minor course corrections on an imprecise bearing. I'm just proud that I've set sail. And if you're a wayfarer too, you should also take pride in leaving yourself enough to create your self.



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## ◀ Double Erasure

Continued from page 35

doubt themselves before anyone else can.

Pohutsky sees the same dynamic playing out in professional and institutional settings. “I would want people to recognize that bi and pan people can and do fall victim to discrimination and challenges in much the same way that other members of the LGBTQ community do,” she said. “Particularly in healthcare or professional settings, we might be less likely to disclose challenges or barriers because addressing them often involves grappling with erasure, which can be a deterrent.”

That’s double erasure doing what it often does: making people quieter. Not because they lack pride, but because they’re tired of being turned into an argument.

The most common “solution” offered to bi and pan people is visibility — be louder, be clearer. But visibility alone doesn’t create safety, and it doesn’t create belonging. Real change means shifting the environments that keep demanding proof.

In LGBTQ+ spaces, that means refusing to treat bisexuality and pansexuality as temporary, unserious or less queer. The shift is cultural, showing up in Pride programming, in who gets invited to lead, and in whether comments that erase people

get challenged when they happen. Being dismissed as “too straight to really count” is a gatekeeping problem, not a visibility one.

In workplaces and schools, it means creating environments where people don’t have to constantly calculate risk, where leaders and educators interrupt “pick a side” language, where someone’s partner isn’t treated as proof of who they are, and where self-identification is respected without follow-up interrogation.

In healthcare and mental health settings, it means providers asking open-ended questions, documenting identity accurately and understanding that a patient’s hesitation to disclose reflects a rational response to having been misunderstood, not resistance to care.

“When it comes to the public, personally speaking, I would prefer a million times over that people ask questions in good faith rather than make assumptions,” Pohutsky said.

That’s a practical starting point. Let bi and pan people be complex without treating complexity as a credibility problem. Double erasure is the stress of being disbelieved, not once but consistently, across the places people are supposed to feel safe. Undoing that takes more than a slogan. It takes sustained recognition, in community spaces, in institutions and in the stories we tell about who counts.



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Melissa Etheridge. Courtesy photo

### ◀ Melissa Etheridge

Continued from page 37

I'm out in the world. And I just let the thought of you be there with me."

I couldn't get preachy about it, I just had to present it so simply with, "Yes, this is an unbearable pain, yet I can set it free and let it go through me and I'm grateful I loved someone so much, that I had a child that I loved so much for the time I had him, and I'm going to keep living and have our foundation and know that his life was not in vain."

**Because you recorded that song first, how did it change every song that came after it?**

Well, it enabled me to then walk in a space

of emotion that was heavy. So I could then sing "Rise" and go, "Yeah, you're going to fall to the earth, but you're going to rise." I could sing "Being Alive." I could say, "This is going to break me. This is going to bleed for a while, but hours turn to days." And I think the whole album is me going, you move on. Life changes every moment. Every breath, there's something different and it's never over.

**This past year, you received your first Rock & Roll Hall of Fame nomination.**

I feel like I'm in the room.

**You had said that your friends have been asking for years why it hadn't happened before. What did it mean to you to both get the**

**nomination and then to learn what the actual results were when you didn't make it in this year?**

It's very nebulous. I didn't do my career thinking, "Oh, I want to be in the Rock Hall." It's something that is there that is subjective in rock 'n' roll. It's impossible to define, and they're trying to, and I think they're playing catch up. And again, I'm just happy to have been in the conversation. I imagine that someday it will happen. I hope I'm still alive. That's just where I'm at, because I want to get up and be at that party, that's all. I just want to play that night. That's what I'm looking forward to. But I'm doing OK. I don't need this, but it's fun.

**Maybe your fans care more than you do?**



My wife definitely does!

**What does it mean to you to be called an icon at this point in your career?**

I don't know what it means, but I do understand.

**Somebody very important and influential.**

Well, there you go. That I've been around long enough. I've certainly done some really cool stuff. And if I can be inspirational to people, if they can look at an icon as something that represents somebody who has been through it, somebody important that has made the choices that they can identify with, then fantastic. I'm all for it.

**Our publication's Pride theme this year is "Hold the Line." What does holding the line mean to you right now? And what would you say to people in this community who are tired or scared?**

Again, I would go to their own personal experience. The best thing you can do for the community is to do for you. Make sure you are thinking enough joyful things. Make sure you're reading enough, because

you can bury yourself in doomscrolling. And you also want to know that there are amazing things happening: families changing and beautiful stories happening every day, just as, yes, there is some negative stuff. But make sure you give yourself a break from negativity and then you will see more positivity. You'll be surrounded. You'll bring more positive people toward you. It all starts with you. And it's not about going and making somebody else change. It's being such an amazing, loving community and knowing that people change just because they experience you and see you.

**You can't take care of other people unless you take care of yourself.**

Simple, simple, simple, simple. Let's all do that.

**What do you hope someone carries with them when they hear these songs on "Rise" during Pride season?**

That you can create that certainty inside yourself. All of us are so much more powerful than we know. And that coming out and being out and being who you are is the best thing you can do for yourself and for your community. I've seen decades of change come from people going, "Oh, well, that guy I work with, oh, he's gay

and I like him. Oh, that person down the street, they're gay. Maybe that's not so bad." That's what changes the world. And we have changed it. And believe me, I've seen so much change. We're doing OK.

**You experienced this all in a really personal way when you came out on a major platform.**

It was very, very frightening.

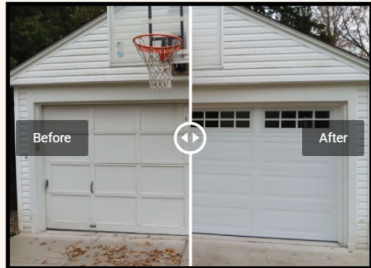
**Well, that means a lot hearing that from somebody who just told me there's less uncertainty in your mind. Clearly you've come a long way.**

Yes. I've seen it and I've seen people change. I remember when in the late '80s, early '90s, we didn't even dare mention gay marriage. That wasn't even a thing. We didn't even know what we would ever call it. We were just trying not to get killed and lose our jobs and get thrown in jail. And so I'm married, and my daughter's married to a woman. We have that right. And yes, stay alert, stay awake and find your joy.

Let people see how loving and joyful you are. And believe in the goodness of people and that we are always moving up, accelerating and becoming more respectful of our differences.

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Puzzle can be found on page 49



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## ◀ Detroit's Realest

Continued from page 10

says of the direct-to-fans approach, "but it's so much more meaningful for me," especially with fans who have been with her for nearly 10 years.

The move fits naturally into a larger philosophy that comes up repeatedly throughout conversation with Tiny Jag: Authenticity is not branding. It is survival.

That commitment to personal and creative alignment runs through both her music and her understanding of Detroit itself.

"What Detroit gives me is [a] spectrum," Tiny Jag says. "Detroit has a true grit about itself. We'll fall into some fads, don't get me wrong, but everyone loves authenticity so much here that even when we're not expressing it at our best, it is something that so many of us are striving to do better and better every day. Detroit is full of people trying to be exactly who they are, who they were designed and born to be."

How has that broadened her as an artist?

"Detroit has allowed me to find ways to connect with just about anyone," she says.

Among the Detroit artists who have shaped her creatively are the Bruiser Brigade collective, including rapper Danny Brown and producer Black Noi\$, for their uncompromising artistry.

"They help me understand the significance

and the value in authenticity," she says. "You don't have to do the dirt to get ahead."

After several years making more polished commercial pop projects — work that led to partnerships with companies like Ford, Uber and Best Buy — she says she now feels drawn back to stranger, sillier and more emotionally unfiltered creative work. "Now I'm ready to show that little 'fuck you' version of myself that's not all wrapped up nicely for Ford, that's not all wrapped up nicely for Best Buy," she says. "I'm ready to just do exactly what the fuck I want to do."

That includes new music and a forthcoming sketch comedy series she describes as "Eric Andre-esque," mixed with "Robot Chicken" chaos and "beautiful Black culture."

That freedom, it turns out, resonates across generations. This rawer, more unfiltered version of herself has also opened something up for her younger fans. She is acutely aware of visibility and representation, particularly for kids looking for reflections of themselves. During a recent interaction at the dispensary where she works, a customer told her his young niece had seen Tiny Jag online and excitedly pointed at the screen.

"She looks like me," she recalls the child saying.

"Moments like that could be a reason to get up," Tiny Jag says. "I tell myself 'There's a little kid out there who needs to see you, just like your ass needed to see you, girl.'"



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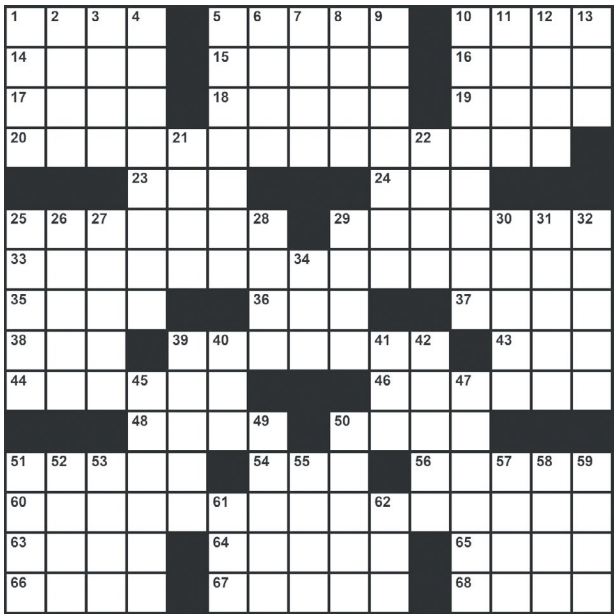
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- 23 "Sudan" suffix
- 24 Lorca's that
- 25 End a hug
- 29 Dionysian attendants
- 33 More of the quote
- 35 Rupert Everett's "\_\_\_\_-a-Porter"
- 36 Sr.'s exam

- 37 Rhett Butler's final word
- 38 Summer hrs. in NY
- 39 More of the quote
- 43 When repeated, campy
- 44 Performs adequately
- 46 Ten-incher, for example
- 48 Carrier's partner in lithography
- 50 The Pointer Sisters' "\_\_\_\_ Excited"
- 51 Where "You'll Never Walk..." in "Carousel"
- 54 PIN requester
- 56 "Star Wars" director
- 60 More of the quote (see the title for the end)
- 63 Half of binary code
- 64 Many a painting by Frida's Diego
- 65 How some take it
- 66 Drag queen \_\_\_\_ Pool
- 67 Gumption
- 68 Voice quality

Down

- 1 Grant in the cinematic field
- 2 Melville tale
- 3 Computer's option list
- 4 Wonder Woman's wrist ornament
- 5 Most brown
- 6 "\_\_\_\_ your disposal"
- 7 One in swaddles
- 8 Carbon compound
- 9 Dramatic scene
- 10 Like a pirate left on an island
- 11 Honolulu's location
- 12 Rabbit or fox title

- 13 Site for three men in a tub
- 21 Straight \_\_\_\_ arrow
- 22 River in France and Belgium
- 25 Increased
- 26 "Taxi" character Elaine
- 27 El Greco's homeland
- 28 "Hey, over here!"
- 29 Sleuth played by Peter Lorre
- 30 Quartz variety
- 31 Ripley portrayer Matt
- 32 Where priests come together
- 34 Yes, or "yech!"
- 39 Like wicker baskets
- 40 "Proud Mary" singer with Tina
- 41 Where Einstein was born
- 42 "Signs" band
- 45 Hanks' Army boss in "Forrest Gump"
- 47 Robert of "Camelot"
- 49 Did a muscle Mary's exercise
- 50 "That is ..."
- 51 Worked up
- 52 "Come here often?" is one
- 53 "Sweeney Todd" hot spot
- 55 Kind of traffic
- 57 "I'm outta here!"
- 58 The A in GLARP (abbr.)
- 59 Eye problem
- 61 Baseball execs
- 62 January holiday monogram

See p. 47 for answers

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◀ **Jessica Wild**  
Continued from page 15

New York, I was out meeting boys and it felt more extravagant. But yeah, my first Pride will always have a place in my heart.

**Speaking of Puerto Rico, when I visited, I was instantly hooked on the plantain dish, mofongo. When you go home to visit, does your mom ever make that for you?**

Ohhhhh yes, my mom is a chef! When I go home to visit, I'll be eating breakfast and she's already asking what I want for lunch. But she's an amazing cook for everything, from mofongo to arroz con gandules, pork, just everything. Puerto Rico is the type of place where, if I lose five pounds before going, I come back weighing 15 more.

**Looking to the future, where do you hope your career goes from here? Is there anything you hope to accomplish that you haven't yet?**

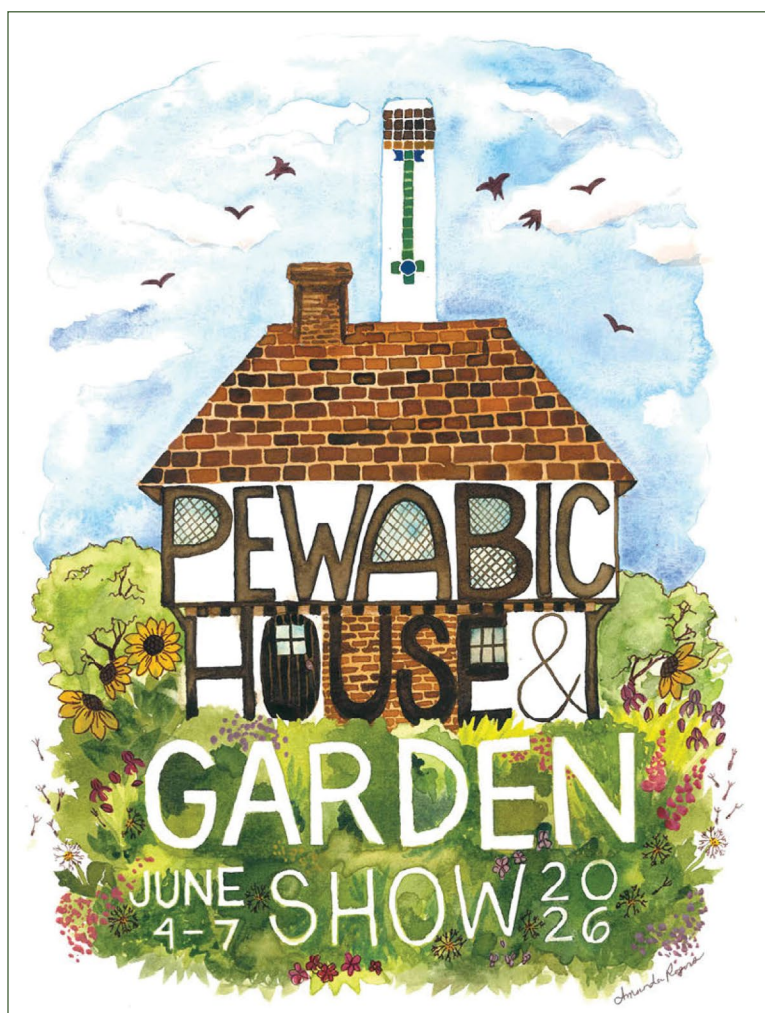
I obviously don't want to die today, but if I did, you can say that Jessica Wild did everything she wanted. All my dreams have come true. I actually spoke about this recently to my friend, who is a psychologist. I was like, "I feel like I did everything," and

they were like...well, you still got a lot of life left, so you need to find new ways to challenge yourself. "All Stars" kind of proved that to me as well, showing me that I still have a lot more in me.

I've really started to love stand-up comedy, so I'm thinking of trying that out. I'd also love to start making more music, especially with a rock band. I did a live show with a rock band recently, and I feel like I formed a bond with these musicians. Even after doing the Rusical episode on "All Stars," a lot of fans were saying I should sing rock music. I'm also planning a tour with my Puerto Rican sisters for next year, so there's a lot coming up!

**If you do end up partaking in another season of "All Stars," are there any queens you'd love to compete against?**

Well, first I'd want my sisters. I love all the girls, and I have no problem with anyone. But, for me, if I'm competing against people like Mariah Balenciaga, Morgan McMichaels or April Carrion, it will be happy competition. From the new generation, I would love to compete with queens like Jewels Sparkles and Morphine Love Dion. But you know, whoever is there is there...and they'll be my competition, so I'll just need to get rid of them!



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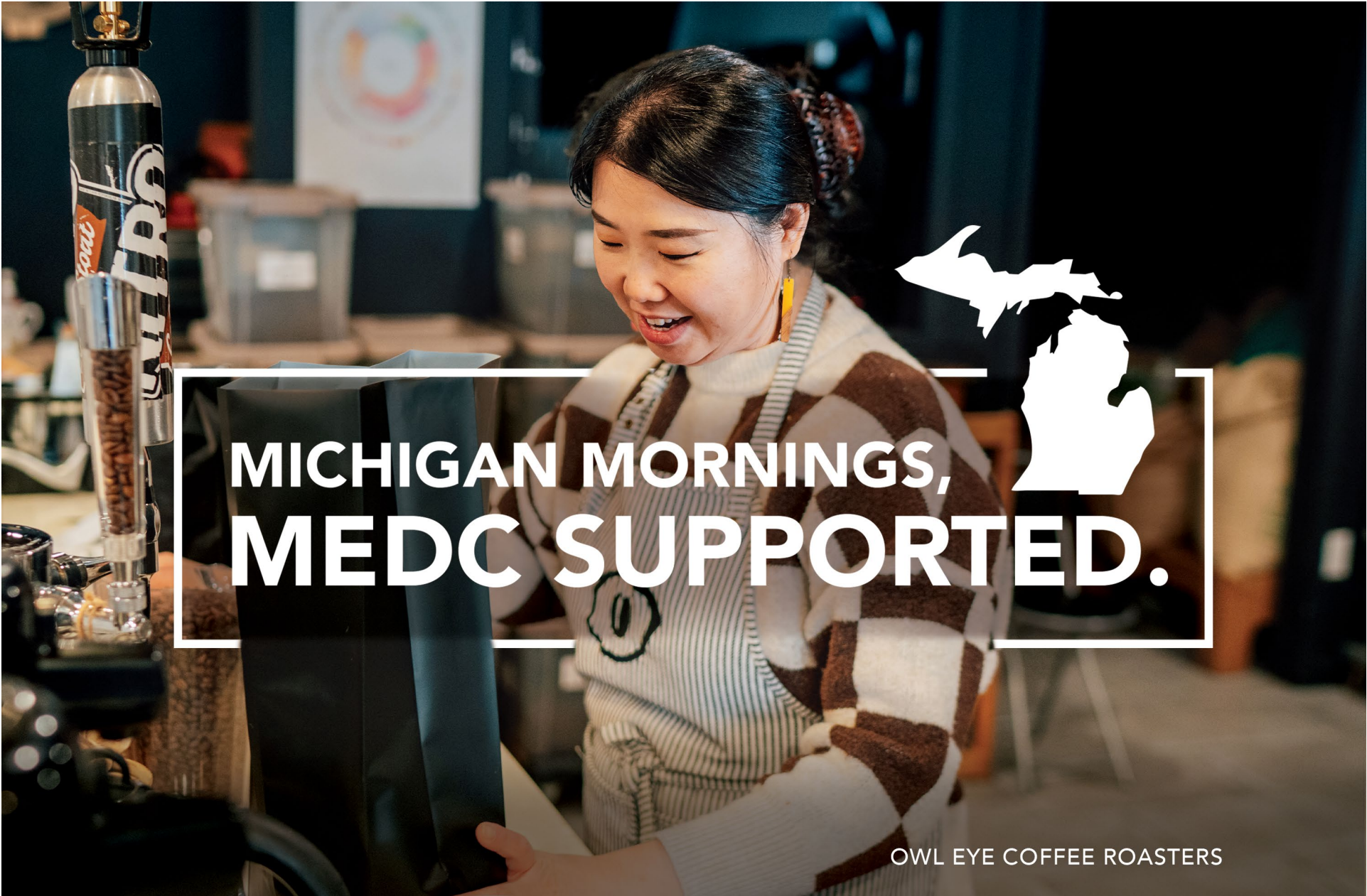
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A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a brown and white patterned sweater, is smiling while working at a coffee roasting machine. The machine has a clear hopper filled with coffee beans. In the background, there are shelves with various items and a poster on the wall.

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